

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN JAPANESE AND WESTERN IMAGES OF GOD  
AMONG MEMBERS OF UNION CHURCH IN KOBE, JAPAN

BY

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A professional project submitted to the faculty  
of the School of Theology at Claremont  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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*This professional project, completed by*

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to determine whether there are differences between Japanese and Western images of God in Kobe Union Church, if so, what they are, and whether these affect the way persons participate in the life of the church. It also sought to determine the effectiveness of preaching in influencing those images, and to draw conclusions for future ministry in this congregation.

The methodology was to design a questionnaire and to distribute it both before and after a two-part sermon series on "How We See God." The intent was to discover the "original" images of God which these people held, to determine whether those images were changed after the sermon series, and determine what effect one's images of God had upon his/her participation in the life of the church.

Concerning the influence of those images, the most unexpected finding of this project was that no causal relationship could be found between the images of God persons held and the level of their participation in the life of the church. One conclusion from this study is that, images of God are developed through participation in the church's corporate life. This is not to say that the preaching ministry is ineffective, for images did change as a result of the two-part sermon series. However, the study also showed (1) that Japanese and Westerners influenced each other's images to a significant degree and (2) that length and regularity of participation in the life of this particular congregation were formative upon both. Clearly, therefore, in order to

nurture appropriate images of God, pastors need to give careful leadership in coordinating their preaching ministry with the fellowship activities of the church.

The results also showed that the differences between the images of the Japanese and Westerners decreased during this study. Open discussion of these different images of God did not create conflict, rather, greater understanding and tolerance grew as alternative images of God were presented and legitimized through discussion which was open and accepting of other views.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem Addressed by This Project.

This project deals with the question of whether there is a significant difference in the images of God which are held by Japanese and Western [this will be limited to persons of European descent] members of Kobe Union Church, and if that is the case, how this influences their response to the preaching ministry of the church.

#### Importance of the Problem.

From seven years experience as a participant in the life of Kobe Union Church, the last three years as pastor, it is apparent that within the congregation there exist persons and groups of persons who hold widely differing concepts and images of God. These come from countries and cultures all over the world, but this project will deal only with a comparison of persons of European descent and Japanese. Over the years the church has struggled, sometimes successfully and sometimes less than successfully, with the problem of how to function vitally as one united church with a membership that holds such divergent views and images of the faith. A vital question is often asked. In our church body, what are the areas of difference which need to be brought



to consciousness so that they can be dealt with constructively as integral parts of our being and ministry, and what are the areas of faith and experience upon which our agreement is sufficiently solid that they can act as the "glue" of Christian fellowship which binds us together as we struggle with these differences?

It is within that context that this project investigates the question of whether our images/concepts of God are a binding force or, as is suspected by this writer/pastor, one of those areas where we need to clarify our thinking and grow together into deeper, more inclusive insights in order more effectively to live as Christ's people while we are together in Kobe, Japan.

For the professional leadership of Union Church, those who are called upon to facilitate this growing unity and mission while at the same time being responsible for the day to day program of the congregation, this is a vital concern. A more precise understanding of these images and concepts, insights into where they differ and where they are significantly similar, would enable the planning and implementation of a more effective preaching ministry. Such a ministry can build upon common images and clarify and "legitimize" images and concepts that, though different, are within the Christian spectrum.

### Hypothesis.

My hypothesis is that there are significant differences in the images of God which are held by the Japanese and Western members of Union Church, and that these images influence the way those persons

understand and act upon the preaching ministry of the church. This hypothesis includes the premise that the opposite is also true; that the preaching ministry of the church brings about a change in those images as well as the way those images are acted upon, and that this change, even over a short period of time, can be measured.

#### Definition of Major Terms.

As the purpose of this paper is to examine differences in the image/concept of 'God' the term is used with its broadest possible meaning to indicate any "divine" being imagined or conceived by the individual. In the case of the term "the gods" the same meaning is used except that the concept becomes plural.

The term "image" is used interchangeably with the term "concept" when discussing persons' "beliefs." The rationale for this is that very often persons responding used any or all of these three words to describe what this pastor understands by the term "image."

#### Work Previously Done in the Field.

Although there is extensive literature on both Buddhist and Shinto concepts of God, this is primarily written by, and often for, priests and scholars, and as this paper deals with the images of lay persons, this literature is useful only as background resources. To my knowledge there has been no previous work done concerning the images and concepts of lay persons in international churches in Japan.

### Scope and Limitations of the Project.

This project is limited to an investigation of persons connected with Kobe Union Church, Kobe, Japan. These persons fall into two categories: 1) members, and 2) friends [i.e. persons who participate regularly in the life of the church and do so for an extended period of time but for various reasons do not choose to become members]. No claim is made for the validity of this study beyond this group; however, it is hoped that the material may be suggestive of the situations of other international churches, especially those in Japan. An additional narrowing of scope is that it deals only with persons who were a part of Union Church at the time of the survey, 1985. Because of the mobility of the expatriate community in Japan, the congregation changes significantly each year. One further narrowing of the focus is that the study is limited to those persons who are willing and able to take the time and effort to participate in the study fully enough to make their participation useful. Judging from past experiences of voluntary participation in studies of similar natures, this willingness is not an insignificant factor in the process, and it must be borne in mind that the responses are, therefore, from the most interested and active participants in the congregation.

The project will focus specifically on how the concept of God used in sermons is perceived by persons who listen to the sermons. Under the rubric of sermons are included the sermon texts, the liturgy and the prayers of the morning worship service where these are related to the concepts of God used in the sermon per se. Henceforth, the term

"preaching ministry" will be used to indicate this usage of the term "sermon." The rationale is the belief of this pastor that there is a basic unity in all that happens in the morning service and that to study the individual units one must do so in relationship to the whole.

As indicated above, the congregation of Union Church, Kobe, includes persons from countries and cultures all over the world. However, this project will compare only those persons of Western [European descent] and Japanese nationalities because these are the only two groups large enough for significant consideration.

A further caution is in order. The Japanese involved in this project are not an "average" group in that they are those who have gained at least a degree of proficiency in the English language, and further have chosen to associate themselves with the international congregation of Union Church. Therefore, their thinking, language patterns and images are those of persons exposed to and/or quite familiar with Western concepts. Some of them are Christians. But even those who are not Christian fall outside the category of "average Japanese." This is important to remember, so that one does not make the mistake of applying these findings as a general rule applicable to all Japanese.

#### Procedure for Integration.

This project deals with the term "God" through an investigation of how this term is perceived when it is used as a part

of the preaching ministry of the church. This preaching brings together in concrete form the theological images of the pastor and the members of the congregation as they meet in the service of worship. It is this interface of meanings which is investigated.

The investigative tool used is a questionnaire<sup>1</sup> through which images of God are elicited. This questionnaire was given to the congregation twice: once through a general church mailing which was sent out before the issue of our images of God was dealt with in sermons, and again at the completion of a two sermon series on our images of God. The final section was different in the second questionnaire, dealing with the issue of church participation.

Before discussing the questionnaire itself, a word needs to be said about how the questions were formulated. This was a two step process. First, selected images and concepts were taken from the Bible and various of the traditional Christian creeds. For Japanese images, Japanese literature was examined. These concepts were combined with images and concepts derived from interviews with Japanese and Westerners who are not participants in the Union Church study group. These persons were asked to write words that describe their experience when they think of God as well as offer images that come to mind or describe how they feel when they experience God. These questionnaires were sent to other Union Churches in Japan. This two-fold method, although time consuming, was used to ensure a better balance of questions than could be expected by the use of a single method of gathering data.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A.

The main questionnaire has two parts. First are the questions concerning our images of God. These questions remained unchanged in the second questionnaire. The final section of the first questionnaire is a series of completion questions where persons are asked to write words that come to mind when they think of God, as well as complete a sentence about their primary experience of God as " . . ." This is similar to the questionnaire sent out to persons outside this study group. The final section of the second questionnaire dealt rather extensively with the individual's level of participation, within the life of the church as well as asking whether, because of their Christian faith, they do anything outside their church activities that they would not do if they were not followers of Christ.

The two sermons dealing with images of God attempt to present those images from two quite different perspectives. The first sermon deals with images of God from a Japanese perspective. This draws on images from a more "popular" or layperson's approach rather than drawing from the images of scholarly Buddhism and Shintoism. As is the case of the difference in the understanding of God between Western theologians and lay persons in the church, there is a difference. The second sermon deals with images of God from a more traditional Western perspective. This is the type of sermon commonly preached in this congregation. It is the firm conviction of this pastor that both these sermons fall within the realm of what is "Christian", as valid images of God are not limited to images which have become traditional and "orthodox" in the Western church. Therefore, it is asserted that a variety of images, although each is partial and incomplete by itself,

are valid and true as images of God in so far as human images of God can be true and valid. My hypothesis is that the way in which a person responds to the approaches of these two sermons will depend upon the images of God that person holds.

### Chapter Outline.

Chapter II is a brief history and description of Kobe Union Church. This historical and demographic material is included to aid the reader in placing this church and its members in proper perspective.

Chapter III will first examine the process and rationale of the selection of the questions for the two questionnaires, as well as the rationale of the questions themselves. Next, it will explicate some of the expectations about the differences between the images and conceptions of God within the congregation.

Chapter IV is an analysis of the two sermons used for this project, in light of the stated goals of the preacher concerning the images of God upon which the sermons are based. Let the reader recall that these sermons are conceived to present, first, an Eastern image of God and then, in the second sermon, a Western image.

Chapter V is an analysis and correlation of the responses to the questionnaire. The responses to the questionnaire will be examined in respect to initial and secondary responses. These will be examined separately and then compared.

Chapter VI is a summary of the findings, and my conclusions

concerning methods, directions and possibilities of how a more effective preaching ministry might approach the task of presenting images of God that are meaningful both to Westerners and Japanese in this international congregation of Kobe Union Church.

The project closes with four appendices in which one will find:

- the questionnaires distributed for this project;
- the tabulations of the two questionnaires used for this study;
- two sermons, presenting an Eastern and a Western image of God, which were preached as part of this project, and
- the liturgies for Sunday morning worship which were used in conjunction with the two sermons.



## CHAPTER II

## HISTORICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF UNION CHURCH

A Brief History. 1

Kobe Union Church is located in the city of Kobe, itself situated in the Kansai or Southwestern part of Japan at the point where Osaka bay opens into the Inland Sea. Kobe has traditionally been, and still is, a port city which makes it a meeting place for Japanese and the "Gaijin" [outsiders] from the rest of the world who come to its shores. Kobe is located in the prefecture called "Hyogo".

On January 1, 1868, fourteen years after the signing of the treaty opening the seaports of Japan to the West, a port named "Hyogo" with approximately 400 early residents and 126 "concession lots" was opened to westerners near the city of Kobe. Life for the "outsiders" in this port was very restricted as foreigners were confined to the city and could not travel outside without imperial permission. Still this foreign concession gradually developed its own community government, and in January 1869 the first foreign baby was born.

The Rev. Henry Blodgett, a missionary on his way to China, was

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1 This section is based on unpublished records of Kobe Union Church primarily compiled by Mrs. Frances Bray a long term missionary and wife of one of the missionary pastors of the church soon after the war. Other records and accounts come from Miss Mioko Kadota a member of the church for over 50 years. Records concerning the German language congregation come from Mr. Wolfgang Galinsky, member of that congregation and former German Consul General in Kobe.

concerned about the great immorality of the bustling new Kobe Concession and succeeded in persuading the Rev. and Mrs. Daniel Crosby Green to move there to begin Christian work. According to Mr. Green's letter of June 14, 1870 to the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions, he held four services in the new Masonic building starting in May of that year.

Although Rev. Green wished to start a formal congregation there were difficulties in calling an organizational meeting. At a meeting called in November 1870 only 8 persons attended, and at a subsequent meeting in January only half that number. Then in a meeting called for early April, with the exception of those who called the meeting, no one attended. Finally on April 22, 1871, 20 persons attended a meeting to approve the construction of a church building. Mr. Greene reported subscriptions amounting to \$2,500 and guaranteed another \$1,000 personally, to build a church which would seat 125 persons, six times the number then attending services. It appears from the contents of one of Mr. Green's letters that the mission board looked askance at his boldness in the guarantee, because, in responding, he told them that what he did with his personal funds was his own business. Another complaint seems to be that the home office was unhappy that a missionary to the Japanese should be devoting his time to this work with foreigners. He responded that as soon as they could find leadership and get him permission to live in the "interior", he would be happy to leave the work with the foreign church, but while he was obliged to live in the same town as hundreds of English-speaking persons for whom there was no other religious teacher, he would continue to be their leader.

The quest for a place to build the church building came to an end with the offer by Mr. Bradfield, an Englishman, of half of a lot cost-free with the understanding that if the site was at any time no longer used for church purposes it should revert to the giver or his successors. So the church building was erected.

A few months later Bishop Alford, an Anglican from Hong Kong passing through Kobe, requested the pastor of this new congregation to read the Anglican Service once or twice a month in order to serve the Anglicans in the community. Although extant letters reveal some dissatisfaction on the part of the Congregationalists to have to "sit through" these liturgical services, this practice continued until the Anglicans built All Saints Church in 1897.

In October of 1872 five missionary families of the American Board met to discuss the maintenance of preaching services in English in Kobe and to organize a church consisting of members of the mission, and of such other Christians as might desire to unite. Then on November 23-24, 1872, a group organized themselves under the name of the Union Church of Christ in Kobe. The list of charter members included many names later to become famous as "missionary families" and community leaders in the young community.

Because of its close association at that time with all the missionaries working in Japan with the American Board, the church in Kobe was considered to be the home church of all who worked hundreds of miles apart in mission stations from Kyushu in the south to Hokkaido in the north. Gradually, however, as each mission station set up its own services of worship, the Kobe group eventually became a local

organization which in 1903 changed its name to Kobe Union Church. At that time the membership was recorded as 178 persons.

By 1927 the business quarter of the growing city had almost engulfed the church, and services were affected by the noise of Sunday shoppers and traffic on the nearby street. In addition, the building which could seat only about 125 was becoming too small. Because the Mitsubishi Bank which owned the lot next door and which had become the financial heir of Mr. Bradfield, the original owner, wanted to expand, a legal arrangement was made whereby the bank would supply monies for a new church building and land if the church would move so the land could revert to the bank. The last service was held in the old church on December 11, 1927 although plans for the new building were not approved by the "pew renters" until February 28, 1928 and the completed building was not finished and dedicated until June 9, 1929.

The church grew in the ensuing years and continued to serve the English speaking community. Then came December 8, 1941 [the 7th in the U.S.], the fateful day of the Pearl Harbor attack. The pastor of Kobe Union Church at that time, Dr. Harry W. Meyers, was arrested and imprisoned. The congregation turned to the Rev. Liemar Hennig, a German national, living in Kyoto, who had recently come from Union Theological Seminary in New York, to help them in their English-speaking service in the afternoon, after his German language service in the morning. Thus the small group of worshippers was able to continue to worship during the war years; persons whose nations were at war, but who as followers of Christ were brothers and sisters to one another as they worshipped God!

It appears that not everyone felt this kind of bond in Christ because records show that there was an attempt by a Japanese Christian congregation to take over the property and building, using the excuse that these "aliens" did not have the right to own property. One of the Japanese members of Kobe Union Church, Miss Mioko Kadota happened to meet Dr. Toyohiko Kagawa the renowned Christian leader one day on the train and was startled when he said that he was sorry to hear that the foreign congregation was going to lose its property. This was the first that the church members had heard about any attempted take over bid. Frantic but careful negotiations followed to save the property. Dr. Hennig and Mr. Carl Hansen went to Tokyo with a Mr. Taniguchi to consult the latter's nephew who was Vice-Minister of Finance in the Japanese Government. The German pastor made it very clear to the prospective Kobe Japanese Christian purchasers that if the English-speaking worshippers were driven out, the German Christians, who were then allies of Japan in the war, would also leave. Because of this stand a compromise was worked out whereby the Japanese, German and English-speaking Christians could share the building. Thus Kobe Union Church owes a great debt to both German and Japanese Christians.

In many ways the spirit of Christian brotherhood was stronger than the wartime spirit of nationalism. Through the bravery and kindness of Miss Kadota, the internees (those who worshiped in the English service) were able to share the meager allowances they received from the international Red Cross to support the benevolence work of the church in the immediate neighborhood. In this way the small congregation shared what little it had during the terrible war years.

There is a hand-written list recording the attendance at the 1944 Christmas service held in English. There were 47 including: 17 Japanese, 6 Russians, 6 Swiss, 5 Germans, 2 Swedes, 2 Danes, 2 Americans, 2 English, and one each Indian, Dutch, Turk, Finn and Hungarian. The note concluded, "enemy sat with enemy to celebrate the the most wonderful of all birthdays."

In the early morning of June 5, 1945, B-29 long-distance bombers wiped out the Kobe Business district, and the church, also hit by the incendiary bombs, burned. All the water mains in that section of the city were broken and there was no way to fight the fire. After the flames subsided, all that remained of the church building was the concrete shell, yet his shell continued to be used as a place of worship. In good weather the congregation carried their chairs to the roofless sanctuary and amid the debris continued their services. When the weather was bad, services were held in the first floor kindergarden room beneath the second floor roofless manse.

After the war ended various military chaplains were helpful to Dr. Hennig in leading the English-speaking services and in providing material assistance. Gradually as the missionaries returned they took responsible leadership, and eventually the property was legally returned to ownership of the German and English-speaking congregations.

During the immediate post-war period nothing was done to refurbish the church building as the congregation rightly decided that their first priority was to help Japanese in the neighborhood to rebuild their homes. Actual rebuilding of the church was begun in 1951 with the restoration of the roof and refurnishing the interior of the sanctuary.

By 1954 the fellowship hall and kitchen were restored and proper chancel equipment and pews installed.

The ministerial duties of the congregation were shared by various missionaries until 1957 when the first full time post-war pastor was called. Although the calling of full time ministers gave greater continuity to the church, whose congregation continued to come and go, one pastor wrote that Kobe Union was not so much a church as "a procession." It has so continued until the present.

#### Demographic Information.

The foreign community in the Kobe-Osaka area has changed considerably in the last twenty years. These changes in addition to being felt in the church are reflected in the constituency of other community groups, most of all the schools. One shift has been the above mentioned procession of persons in and out of the community. The change is reflected in the rate of turn over. It has accelerated. Twenty, even 10 years ago one could expect that a large percentage of business persons would enter the community and remain for from three to five years. The average stay now seems to be closer to one year with many staying less. Another change is that numerically the number of (main line) missionaries, those who could be expected to support a union church when they were not engaged in the Japanese church, has dropped significantly. Indeed in the local international school the missionary children have dropped from almost 35 percent a decade ago to under two percent today. Another change in the church concerns the percentage of

Japanese members. When our oldest Japanese member joined in 1931-3, she was only the third Japanese to be allowed membership in Union Church. Today approximately one-third of Union Church's members are Japanese. The other factor is the percentage of quite conservative missionaries coming to Japan in proportion to those in the so-called "Main Line" group. This has changed the atmosphere of the foreign community, and as fewer of these missionaries participate in a Union Church, it has meant a smaller percentage of missionary families in our congregation.

The present day city of Kobe has a population of about 1,500,000, and as Kobe merges with Osaka on the east, the church is situated in a metropolitan area of about 9-10,000,000. Of the approximately 40,000<sup>2</sup> foreigners in Kobe about 2,500 are English speaking. At this writing the church has approximately 150 members and friends [i.e. persons who for one reason or another do not become members of Union Church but are active in the fellowship], and an average attendance of about 110-120. Church supported activities include the Community House and Information Centre (CHIC) [ a community group to help foreigners appreciate and learn to live successfully in Japan], the International Counseling Centre (ICC) [offering professional counseling to the multi-lingual foreign community], plus a Day Care group and the usual activities of an urban congregation. The congregation is approximately one-third English-speaking Japanese, about one-half persons of European descent and the remainder persons from other countries.

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2 Figures taken from the Census Records of the Overall Planning Section of the Department of Statistics of the Mayor's Office. Kobe, Japan, 1984.



## CHAPTER III

## THE QUESTIONNAIRES: METHODOLOGY AND EXPECTATION

The Process of Gathering and Selecting images.

When one attempts to elicit the often unconscious images of another, the very process of investigation must itself be closely examined. In order to augment this pastor's limited experience, a rather lengthy process was employed for selecting questions for the questionnaire. This process was deemed important to ensure that the questions were truly representative. By means of this process a series of contrasting images of God was compiled. These were then used to evaluate whether or not the images of God held by Japanese and Western members of Union Church, Kobe, are indeed different.

It is the hypothesis of the present writer that the images and perceptions of God that the members of the congregation hold often differ from the "officially stated" theological dogmas of the church. Further, it is believed that the images and perceptions of the pastor will differ, and at times differ significantly, from those held by participants in the church. Lastly, and for this project most crucial, it is the hypothesis of this paper that the images of the Japanese and Western members of Union Church will differ. It is one purpose of this paper to determine to what extent.

For the process of compiling a questionnaire, images were gathered from traditional and readily available sources, as these

sources are those most easily available to the lay person. Rather than dig into theological texts, I took words and images from the three most often published creeds of the church: the Apostles' the Nicene and the Korean creeds. These appear in the back of many church hymnals and are found in both The Methodist Hymnal<sup>1</sup> (used by Union Church until the 1960's) and the Pilgrim Hymnal<sup>2</sup> which is presently in use.

For more traditional Japanese images such books as Shinto: the Kami Way,<sup>3</sup> "The Kami Concept,"<sup>4</sup> and Buddhist-Christian Empathy,<sup>5</sup> were helpful as background reading.

One further source came from class papers of Jr. and Sr. high school students of Kei Mei Girls School in Kobe, Japan, where the writer was an instructor of Bible for three years.

The final input came from a one page questionnaire sent to the other Union/International Churches in Japan.<sup>6</sup> In this questionnaire persons were simply asked to reply to various stimuli concerning God: "To me God is," "Words that come to mind when I think of God are," "When I think of God I feel," and so forth. Of the approximately 100 questionnaires sent out 33 were returned. Six of these were from Japanese. Although this percentage of return is quite an acceptable one when dealing with unknown persons. One pastor wrote that some of his

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- 1 Methodist Hymnal (New York: Methodist Publishing House, 1939)
  - 2 Pilgrim Hymnal (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1969)
  - 3 Sokyō Ono, Shinto: The Kami Way (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1962)
  - 4 John Keane, "The Kami Concept," Oriens Studies, No. 16 (December 1980)
  - 5 Joseph Spae, Buddhist-Christian Empathy (Tokyo: Orens Institute for Religious Research, 1980).
  - 6 See Appendix A.

parishoners refused to return the questionnaire until they were certain that he (their pastor) would not see them.

### The Questionnaires.

The above sources were evaluated, responses were tabulated and categorized. The responses received were compared with the literary source material and questions were drawn up for the questionnaire itself.

The basic tool for this research was a questionnaire, which was distributed twice.<sup>1</sup> First, without any specific input concerning images of God, and second, after a two sermon series on "How we see God," the questions were again distributed. The object was to determine whether the preaching ministry of the church (here limited to these two sermons) influenced the images of God held by the parishoners.

The questions were grouped into three general headings: Perceived Qualities of God, Perceptions of the Reality of God, and Perceptions of the God-Human Relationship.

Questions in the section on Perceived Qualities of God, attempt to evaluate notions of the omnipotence and/or omniscience of God over and against the concept of a limited God. This line of questioning continues in queries concerning the origin of evil; does it arise out of the being of God or is there another "spiritual" being in competition with God? The section ends with questions about whether God is one who

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A.

grants favors to the faithful or whether persons enter into covenant with God in order that God may send them out in mission. This is the problem of, "Why Pray?" -in order to receive something from God, or to be enlisted in God's work?

The next series of questions deals with concepts of monotheism versus polytheism as well as questions concerning whether or not God is an actual reality or merely a psychological projection from within the human spirit.

The final series of questions deals with the divine-human relationship and attempts to discover how persons experience/sense the presence of God within their daily lives. In responding to questions about who is Jesus, of the meaning and purpose (if any) of prayer, of the perceived reality of "miracles," personal images of God are disclosed.

The questions themselves are made as statements which the respondents are to list in the order of preference: 1st, 2nd, 3rd or 4th choice. If a question does not apply to them they are asked to cross it out. There is also an opportunity to check "other" and write in a response different from the choices listed. As stated above, the same twenty questions were given twice. The questions and possible answers are identical in both questionnaires. The first questionnaire was distributed without prior input (except for extensive explanation of the nature of the study and how to complete the questions). A short final section of this first questionnaire asks persons to "write in" their images and concepts of God. The second questionnaire was distributed after worship following the second sermon in the series -additional

copies were mailed to those not present (some of whom listened to a tape of the sermon). The rationale for this is to discover whether there is a shift in answers of those who attended worship during the series.

The second questionnaire concludes with a rather extensive section concerning church involvement as well as asking whether persons are active outside the church fellowship in a conscious manner because they are followers of Christ. The questions about church involvement cover activities from "mere attendance" to leadership and financial support.

Because of past experience in this congregation it was anticipated that this study would demonstrate that significant differences exist between the images of the Japanese and Western members of the congregation. The same holds true of the level of participation within the life of the congregation. This writer would not postulate that this difference is caused entirely because of differences in images of God, perhaps not even primarily so, but the image of God that persons hold does, indeed, influence their perception of the world and of themselves within that world, and how they are able to respond to that world. One purpose of this paper is to discover the extent of that influence.

## CHAPTER IV

## ANALYSIS OF THE TWO SERMONS

Goals of this Project.

The immediate short range goal of this project is to address the question of whether there is a difference in the images of God held by the Japanese and Western members of the congregation of Kobe Union Church. If this is found to be the case, then a second question needs to be addressed. In what way, if any, do these different images of God influence how these two groups of persons relate within the congregational life.

To begin the investigative process, two sermons with all the accompanying liturgy were written and delivered. The purpose was to present a context in which people with different Christian experience and theological backgrounds could recognize their own theological stance as a legitimate position, and at the same time recognize that images and responses to God different from those which they hold can also be legitimate stances of faith. The sermons were written to present contrasting images which confront the listener with a choice between two quite different approaches. Although it must be stated here that this pastor recognizes, indeed holds as a matter of theological truth, that the reality of God is sufficiently great to include both these and many other images within that divine reality, these were written with the assumption that 1) the sermons could be presented in

such a way that persons clearly recognize that different images were being presented, and that 2) each person would tend to identify with one image more than the other.

One long range goal of this project is to encourage persons to enter into a growth process in their own faith, both on the personal level and as members of the total community.

This is important because in Union Church we have discovered that when persons come overseas, especially those who come for the first time, one of two things tends to happen. First, some persons find the adjustment to this new and very different culture so threatening that they seek in the church a reminder of home, a place of security, a community where things are done "the way they were back home." These persons tend to cling to old images and forms, wanting sermons, theology and liturgy which are familiar to them. On the other hand, there are persons so excited by this new environment that they actively seek out experiences which are different from what they have previously known. These persons are eager to experience and actively participate in new types of liturgy, and are open to theological stances different from those to which they are accustomed. Both types are present in Union church. Because of the presence of these diverse persons one of the primary ministries of Union Church is to provide an open, accepting community which encourages and facilitates spiritual growth.

Therefore, the first step toward implementing our long-range goal is to encourage and facilitate persons to evaluate exactly what it is that they do believe and examine the images of God and the faith which they hold, as well as explore those things they do not believe,

and become aware of the areas in their faith where they are open to questioning and, therefore, to spiritual growth.

The next step in this process is to help persons to see the images/beliefs which they hold, within the framework of the total Christian context. It is also important to encourage them to accept themselves and their images within this larger context. In the rare case where a person's images and/or faith is such as to be contrary to Christ's teachings as those teachings are understood by the community here in Kobe [i.e. images or a life style based upon hate, revenge, fear etc.] the task of the community is to provide acceptance for that person, as a child of God, while challenging the validity of the images portrayed. This process includes helping those persons see the strengths of the images they hold, while at the same time learning to understand any weaknesses, so that they may be able to accept and work with persons of other persuasions, who hold other, indeed conflicting, images of God and the faith. In this process it is important to recognize that, because our images and concepts are all incomplete and finite, other contrasting images can and do reflect the image of God with equal validity.

The goal of this process is to open persons to the possibility of considering new images for themselves, images even quite different from those with which they have grown up. In one sense it is not as essential that they adopt these new images as it is that they seriously grapple with them; that they see and understand that there is also validity and honesty within these other images. It is the belief of this pastor that this process helps make persons more accepting of



others.

As stated above, Union Church is a congregation of persons from very diverse backgrounds. Because of this we often experience tension in our corporate life between these different groups of people who have hitherto always worshipped with others who think as they do, hold theological positions which they hold, and worship in similar patterns. When they discover that this is not the case in Union Church they are often faced with a crisis of faith. Therefore, both the immediate goal of discovering whether we hold diverse images, and what the effect of those images is on our corporate life, and the long range goal of understanding and accepting both our own and others' images of God are vital.

#### The Selection Process for these Sermons.

It is clearly recognized that the decision of which one image to use to represent a Japanese and then a Western expression of God is an arbitrary one. Western readers are aware that the "image pool" from which any western image is drawn is vast, deep and diverse. No one image can ever represent the whole. It is not different for Japanese images. However, this project attempts to deal, not with the depth of images which can be found in the literature of the saints and scholars of these great religious traditions but, rather, with their understanding and expression on the everyday level. Here it is asserted that there is a visible difference. When one who has been raised in a Western country steps into Japan, that person is immediately aware that

things are not the same. Gradually, after some years of living and learning, one begins to become aware that many of these differences stem from an entirely different experience of life, to which one's position before "the gods" is a contributing factor. Therefore, it is asserted that the following choices, although arbitrary in one sense, are not without foundation.

Each selection was made after narrowing the possibilities to three choices. The choice for the sermon which was to represent Western thought was made from the following possibilities: 1) God as suffering on behalf of humanity. This is a powerful image even here in Japan and a reason that some Japanese Christians give for their initial interest in Christianity. 2) God as one who calls persons to join God's purpose for this world. This is an important image throughout the entire Biblical narrative. 3) God as a being of great power. This is one reason many Japanese became interested in Christianity following WWII, that is, since they as a people had been defeated by the United States, they assumed it must be because the God of America was stronger than the gods<sup>1</sup> of Japan and they wanted to learn about that God.

The choice of which sermon was to represent the Japanese image was made from the following possibilities: 1) God, or "the gods" as being represented by one's ancestors. In Japanese thought, in a sense<sup>2</sup> all beings, including humans, are considered kami. However, it is the ancestors as the closest link to the spiritual world to whom prayers are

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Phillip Williams of Doshisha University of Kyoto, in private conversation.

<sup>2</sup> Sokyo Ono, Shinto: the Kami Way (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1962), p 6-8.

often addressed. 2) God as one to whom persons go when they want something they can't get by themselves. 3) God as the experience of "Satori" or enlightenment, God as one's True Self, "I am the Buddha!"<sup>3</sup>

In making these choices, since these images were to be presented in a sermon within a Christian worship service, only those images which could find their expression in Christian scriptures were considered.

For the final choice of an image to represent a Western concept of God it was decided to use "God who calls humans into mission." It must be understood that this is the call for persons to enter into God's mission, not the practice of claiming that God supports or blesses some human enterprise. The reasons for this choice are as follows. First, because there is strong Biblical support for this image. The text from Isaiah 6:1-8, which is used for the O.T. text is but one of many in which this image appears.

Next, because of its absence in the everyday experience of the Japanese. This was a surprising discovery. Many Japanese were questioned about this image and without exception it was discovered that it was novel for them. One of the American women in our congregation, who is married to a Japanese man, teaches a class of English conversation to Japanese housewives. She had these women, none of whom are Christian, complete this questionnaire. One of her comments was that some of the questions were very difficult for the women to understand and, although she speaks fluent Japanese, she had trouble explaining the meaning. Specifically she said that the women asked,

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph J. Spae, Buddhist-Christian Empathy (Tokyo: Oriens Institute for Religious Research, 1980), p. 114.

"What is sacrificial mission?" She reported that after she explained the Christian meaning, the women, to a person, said that they had never thought of God in that way before. Finally, it is perhaps honest to say that this image was chosen because it is a vital image for this pastor.

For the image to represent the Japanese experience, it was decided to use "God as one to whom one goes when one wants something that one cannot get by oneself." Because it could be interpreted as a negative commentary on the Japanese people, a negative attitude built into the study, this choice was at first strongly resisted. However, after extensive talks with numerous Japanese of many walks of life, talks where it was unanimously agreed that, indeed, this is one of the most common attitudes toward God, the image was selected. For the person in the street this is a primary image of God. On New Year's Eve and New Year's Day 1985 the different Japanese Television Broadcasting Systems sponsored coverage of the activities of many shrines and temples across the country. A part of that coverage consisted of numerous interviews with persons going to shrines or temples for their New Year's greetings. At Eibesu shrine in Osaka persons were asked how much money they threw into the collection box AND "What did you pray for?" The answer was always for prosperity. One man replied unashamedly, "Mochiron, Shobai . . ." [Of course, for (prosperity in) my business.] This pastor watched many hours of such interviews with persons all over the country and the answers, although varying in wording, invariably carried the same message: "I prayed to have prosperity in . . ." This is true not only at the New Year, for people also flock to shrines and temples at the time of school exams. Once again in television news

coverage, when asked what they prayed for people replied "for success in the exam and entrance into a good school." Young women often go to shrines to pray for a good marriage match. (In days past when marriages were all arranged by parents, this may have been the only influence they felt they had concerning their future husband.) For the reasons stated here, these two sermons were chosen to represent Japanese and Western images of God. Let us now turn to an analysis of the sermons themselves.

#### Content Analysis of the Sermons.

In an attempt to demonstrate clearly the difference between these two images, each sermon follows the format of answering the same three questions. Because the sermons were shaped by this outline rather than taking life from the texts and their contents, they are somewhat artificial. In light of this weakness it is not surprising to discover that when preached, the actual sermons tended to diverge somewhat from the proposed outline.

The sermon representing the Japanese experience was titled: "Ask and ye shall receive," [Matt. 7:7] with the subtitle from Genesis 12:2 which is God's promise to Abraham "I will bless you, . . ."<sup>4</sup> The Scripture readings for the morning were Psalm 30, James 5:13-15, and Matthew 7:7-11. The purpose of the introduction to the sermon is to assert that the images of God we hold, determine how we relate to God.

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4 See Appendix C.

The first section is in answer to the question, "Before what kind of God do we live our lives?" Moving through images of God held by ancient "man," images of God as vengeful or capricious, the sermon moves to the teaching of Jesus that God is a trustworthy God before whom we can live in an attitude of confidence and expectation, for God supplies our daily needs and answers our prayers. The purpose of this section is to affirm God's benevolent love for humanity.

The second question "Why Pray?" continues from that image of God. The Epistle text from James is admittedly a specialized text, as it deals specifically with healing, but nonetheless gives ONE scriptural answer, which is part of the Judeo-Christian heritage, to the question "Why Pray?" Several examples are cited to show that this same healing practice continued in the early church for centuries after Biblical times. Then the concept of healing is expanded beyond the physical realm of life to include all aspects of life.

The final section deals with the question, "What attitude should we adopt before God?" The 30th psalm is examined as a link between the concept of healing and our attitude before God. Because of an experience of being healed, the psalmist gives praise to God. "O Lord my God, I will give thanks to thee for ever" [v. 12 RSV]. Therefore, our attitude, as those who have at least to some degree been healed by God, is one of giving praise to God. Otherwise we would not return to worship each week.

The point of this sermon is that we live before a trustworthy, loving God who cares for our daily needs. We are promised that if we ask of God, (seek and ye shall find) God will answer our prayers,

perhaps not in the way we ask, but in a way consistent with divine love. Therefore, let us claim that promise.

The sermon representing a Western concept of God was titled "Go and do likewise,"<sup>5</sup> with the subtitle from the second half of Genesis 12:2 ". . . so that you may be a blessing." The point of the introduction is to remind the congregation that our images of God define our relation to God.

The first question, "Before what kind of God do we live our lives?", details Isaiah's vision and call (Isaiah 6:1-8), asserting that this vision tells us something of the reality of God. God is shown as great, majestic and, most of all, Holy. God's holiness exposes human sinfulness. Isaiah's experience of his own sinfulness, followed by his confession of the same, is followed by an experience of being forgiven by God. At that moment Isaiah hears God's call to him to participate in God's work among humanity. The point is that the revelation of God is always accompanied by a revelation of God's mission in the world.

The second question, "Why Pray?", understands the vision of the apostle Paul in much the same light as the vision of Isaiah. Although not specifically stated, because of his life as a devout Pharisee, this vision is understood as an answer to Paul's previous prayers. Therefore both Isaiah and Paul, as well as Peter whose example follows, discovered that the result of prayer was to be enlisted into the mission of God.

The third question, "What attitude do we adopt before God?", examines a third vision, that of Peter. The result of this vision is

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5 See appendix C.

to have a broader understanding of God's people, those whom God loves. This seeing "through the eyes of God" enlarged Peter's understanding of the realm of God's love, "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." [Acts 11:34b] Then, amazed that God sends the Holy Spirit to these non-Jews, Peter plays his new found role and baptizes them. Peter's amazement indicates that our attitude before God can be one of gratitude at being found worthy to be included in this new ministry, and joy at the newly discovered inclusiveness of God's love.

The point of this sermon is that when we experience ourselves before God, when we experience ourselves standing in the presence of God, we discover that our loving, forgiving God is calling us into mission.

Perhaps a word needs to be said about the liturgy, since this is a vital factor in preparing persons to hear the message of the sermon. The printed liturgy can be found in appendix "D" but a word might be said about the children's sermons. The children's sermons are included in the service for the purpose of relating specifically to the children.

They are NOT intended to speak to the adults present. However, it must be recognized that for some persons, perhaps understandably the second language persons in the congregation, these childrens' talks are as important in their worship experience as the sermon per se. The children's sermon which dealt with a Japanese image, spoke of a girl who wanted to swim at the beach, but because the waters were shark infested her mother refused to let her swim, taking her sailing instead. Only when she herself saw sharks did the girl understand that her mother had



acted out of love. This was then related as the way God often answers our prayers. The point was that God often gives us things better than we ask for.

The children's sermon which focused on the Western image of God was a story of a girl who prayed for God to melt the winter snow so birds could find food to eat. When she complained that God hadn't answered her prayer, that the snow hadn't melted, her mother suggested that when God made her (the girl) concerned for the birds, God had in this way answered her prayer. The suggestion was made that God sometimes asks US to participate in the doing of God's work of loving.

These were the images to which the congregation was asked to respond. These responses are reported in the next section.

## CHAPTER V.

## CORRELATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRES

The reader may recall that in the first section of the questionnaires, persons were asked to list their replies in order of preference: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th or "other" [wherein they could write in a response not listed above]. They were asked to cross out all answers which did not apply to them. Answers of first and second preference are considered to be positive, while answers crossed out (or left blank) are considered to be negative. Third and fourth choices are considered to be neutral and do not play a part in the evaluation. A significant portion of the findings of this paper come from an examination of those responses which were negative as well as from an examination of those which were positive.

On the identical first portion of the two questionnaires the responses are grouped for evaluation into the following three categories: A. Perceived Qualities of God, B. Perceptions of the Reality of God, and C. Perceptions of the God-Human relationship. The exact percentage of each response can be found in Appendix B.

A Control Group.

To prepare a basis from which to evaluate the responses from persons within Union Church, a control group of twenty-five Japanese women, all non-Christians, were asked to respond to those questions

found in the first section of both questionnaires. These women are members of an English conversation class taught by one of the women of our congregation. They responded in English and, although as stated in chapter I this indicates some familiarity with Western thinking, the inclusion of this group is important since as a group of non-Christians they represent a more "average Japanese" group of persons against which to evaluate the responses of persons in Union Church.

Perceived Qualities of God. The following were the responses of this control group to queries investigating the question, What kind of God do we believe, feel, experience we live before? What are the qualities we believe are intrinsic in the Divine Being?

In response to a question about what one "feels" when thinking about God, 60% said that they experienced a feeling of comfort and peace. Only one person indicated that because of her life style she felt disturbed to sense herself in the presence of God. Considering that 64% also responded negatively to the possibility of feeling "excited and alive" when they think of God, it appears that reassurance and peace is the primary "feeling" these women experienced when thinking about God.

To a question concerning God's perceived "closeness" to or "distance" from humanity, as well as the attitude of God toward humanity, there was little conclusive consensus. A simple majority listed "majestic but distant" as their perception of God. This was reinforced by an 80% negative response to two questions picturing God as close at hand and interested in everything a person does. Neverthe-

less, 64% also responded negatively to a suggestion that God is "uninterested" in one's daily activities. Similarly a negative response was given to suggestions that God was either merely a life principle or an uninterested creator. This picture is further confused by an additional negative response to questions likening God to a parent (Mother/Father). In light of these negative responses it was surprising that 68% responded positively to the suggestion that God is like the spirit of their ancestors. On a later query about prayer, over half indicated that they do indeed pray to the spirits of their deceased ancestors.

When asked about their perception of the extent of the power of God, here again, there was no clear agreement. However, a simple majority did posit God as all-powerful but self-limiting. Although, with the exception of the aforementioned self-limiting power of God, all the responses to the choices in this question were negative. 84% also responded negatively to the suggestion that God is in competition with "Satan" who is likewise very powerful.

The foremost characteristic of God was thought to be one of total acceptance of anything people do. This stance was reinforced when over 70% rejected the idea that God demands people act justly toward others, and over 75% rejected the notion that God would be willing to suffer for the benefit of humanity.

The image of "seeing God" or standing before God, as depicted in the second sermon concerning Isaiah's vision [6:1-8] (which of course these women did not hear and probably have not read) was similar to the above. There was almost unanimous rejection of the idea that because God

is holy, sinful persons would die if they came into God's presence, yet, less than half expect to experience acceptance and love if they "see God," while over 70% believe that what they would discover in such an experience would be their own "deeper" or unconscious self. No matter what that revelation might be, more than 90% rejected the suggestion that if they "saw God," they would be personally called into sacrificial mission in the world.

Concerning the root cause of evil in the world, over half attributed that evil to the mistakes of persons who turn away from God. Almost 90% rejected the idea of Satan causing evil by rebelling against God, and over half rejected the idea of evil coming from spiritual powers other than God. It must be mentioned that more than three-fourths also rejected the idea of evil coming from God (i.e. as the creator of everything, therefore, also the creator of evil in the world). Evil is seen to originate in the human being.

Concerning the question of "miracles" some interesting comments emerged. The suggestion that miracles simply don't happen was rejected by over 80% of the respondents. The only response which was affirmed was one which stated that miracles have nothing to do with God, as two responses which acknowledged God as the cause of "miracles" were rejected. One respondent replied that her mother was a faithful believer in one of the Japanese "New Religions" and as such, she "often meets miracles." She did not indicate what she understood those miracles to be. Although the reality of miracles was not rejected by these women, miracles were understood apart from God, as "natural" workings which we do not [yet?] understand.

Perceptions of the Reality of God. This section addresses two questions: (1) Is God a true reality in the universe or merely a psychological projection of the human spirit; and (2) Is the Deity one or many?

Concerning the question of whether God is one or many, 84% rejected the possibility [in question 14:A] that God is the One reality in existence, (i.e. the one upon which all others depend). In fact, the most positive response [14:D - 56%] was that God is merely our human unconscious. It must be said that there is little awareness of God to be found in these womens' responses.

Question number eight concerns "the gods." Are they real, human inventions, or another way to formulate what Christians explain with the doctrine of the Trinity? Since most of these women are unaware of this Trinitarian formulation, it is not surprising, that 80% rejected the notion that "the gods" are similar to the Christian doctrine. 84% also rejected the suggestion that "the gods" are real, but less powerful spiritual beings than God. Since 68% rejected the statement that "the gods" are nonexistent, and merely human inventions, this leaves open the question of whether these gods are real and equally powerful as God. In response to this set of questions one person wrote in "I don't think so deeply!"

The concept of "the gods" is again addressed in the eleventh question where there was a surprising affirmation of the statement that there are different gods for each person and country. However, the next question, that there are many gods but the Christian God is the most powerful of all, was strongly rejected. The following statement, that

there is only one God even though people have different understandings of that one God, was also rejected by 60% of the respondents. Finally and probably understandably, every person except one rejected the statement that there is only one God, and all the rest are demons.

Given this image of God we turn to questions of who is Jesus Christ. It is not surprising that over three-fourths of the group rejected the notion that Jesus is The [one] Son of God. Responses were almost equally divided on the suggestion that Jesus is A Son of God like Buddha and, although strongly rejecting the suggestion that Jesus was God living with us in human form, they responded positively to the statement that Jesus is one who shows us what God is like.

Perceptions of the God Human Relationship. These questions address the issue of whether there is a divine-human relationship, and if so what is the quality of that relationship. They were first asked to indicate how important "God" is in their life by stating how often they think of God. The majority disagreed with the statement that God is unimportant, 44% stating that God was important enough in their lives that they thought of God every day. Yet a majority indicated that they thought of God only when they experienced trouble.

What does this thinking of God mean in their lives? To the statement that, "because of God I . . ." the most positive response was that they must treat others with love and respect! Slightly over half also felt that because of God they can overcome problems and face life with hope, and although only one in three expect to be loved and forgiven by God, few felt that the presence of God prevented them from

doing the things they wanted to do in life.

We will now look at the role which prayer plays in the divine-human relationship for this group of non-Christian women. The reason which was overwhelmingly given for praying was that one prays in order to receive comfort and/or healing for self or others. Just under half also prayed asking God to grant their requests, but only one in four prayed asking God to tell them how to live. Over 90% rejected the notion of praying in order to ask God to make them into God's child.

Concerning when they pray; 80% stated that they prayed when they have a problem that they can't solve by themselves, 44%, when they want God to do something for them, and 33%, when they are happy. A suggestion that one prays in order to learn God's will for one's life was strongly rejected.

To whom do they pray? 44% stated that they pray to "God," while over half indicated that they [also?] prayed to the Spirits of their dead ancestors. 64% responded that they are uncertain to whom they pray, but pray to "something greater than myself." Since these women are not Christians it is not surprising to discover that most rejected Jesus as the object of their prayers. Surprising was the fact that two of them did indicate that they prayed to Jesus.

Repeatedly these women rejected suggestions that the God-human relationship, or the aim of prayer, is for the purpose of the human participant being subsumed into the will of God. Questions number seventeen and nineteen address the issue of whether or not God chooses special persons to work with and, if that is the case, why God chooses them. When presented with this possibility, the vast majority rejected



the idea that God chooses persons because God has a task for those persons to do. Over 80% rejected the suggestion that it might be because God loved these persons more than others. This was the one question for which there were the most "other" responses. "God doesn't choose special people," and "God loves everybody," were two responses, and in a statement supporting human freedom was the reply, "They, the people, chose God, it was not God who chose the people." Question nineteen, which dealt with an understanding of Genesis 12:2, was one with which these women, as non-Christians, were basically unfamiliar and most of them left these answers blank; some stating that they didn't understand the Bible and therefore didn't understand the question. What was surprising was the fact that one third of the women responded favorably to the statement that God established a relationship with Abraham in order to bless others through Abraham. In reply to the query about what constitutes a faithful life, the greatest number responded "prayer and thanksgiving to God." Surprisingly, in light of the above response, less than half thought that a faithful life was "seeking to do what God calls us to do." Perhaps because of its particular Christian formulation, 80% were negative to the suggestion that working and helping in the church, or telling others of God's love in Jesus Christ constitutes a faithful life.

#### The First Questionnaire.

We now move to an examination of the responses by persons in Union Church to the first questionnaire. These were tabulated and

recorded in exactly the same manner as the control group. For the sake of clarity the responses of both the Japanese and Western respondents will be dealt with as each question is discussed. These two groups consist predominantly, although not exclusively, of Christians. The first set of questions concerns our perceptions of the kind of, and qualities intrinsic to, that God before whom we believe we live.

Perceived Qualities of God. Responding to the question of how we "feel" when we think of God, the overwhelming response of both Japanese and Westerners was that of feeling comforted and at peace. Neither Japanese nor Westerners indicated being disturbed or uncomfortable in God's presence. Two-thirds of both groups experienced feeling excited and alive when they thought of God. But the greatest difference between the two groups was in response to the statement that a person could think of God and still feel no different: 68% of the Westerners felt one could not do that, yet less than half of the Japanese had that experience.

There was no consensus regarding the statement that God is majestic but distant, yet to the following statement, that God is always close like a friend, there was strong agreement. In light of this response it was surprising to see that on the next statement, that God is interested in everything we do, while 87% of the Westerners responded positively, only 43% of the Japanese did so. The next statement which put this negatively, saying God is uninterested in our daily activities, was rejected by both groups. Although the Japanese clearly rejected the notion that God is uninterested in our daily activities, unlike the

Westerners, they were not prepared to affirm that God is interested in everything we humans do.

Question number five asks for a response to the statement: "To me God is . . ." A majority of both Japanese and Westerners responded positively to the proposition that God is a life principle. These positive responses are surprising in light of the previous affirmation that God is like a parent (mother or father) where 70% of the Japanese and almost 90% of the Westerners agreed. It is not clear how God can be both a life principle, and at the same time like a parent.

Both groups rejected the notion that God, the Creator, was no longer interested in humanity, and while it is not at all surprising to discover that 93% of the Westerners reject the notion that God is like the spirit of our ancestors, it of interest to note that 78% of the Japanese in the congregation also rejected that image.

Question number seven of the questionnaire deals with the perceived power of God. There was strong agreement with the statement that God is all powerful. A majority of the foreign members of the congregation believe that although God is all powerful, God is self-limiting, but that is a minority view among the Japanese. Both groups strongly reject the notion that God is limited in power [i.e. as opposed to being self-limited]. Only one in ten believe that God is in competition with Satan who is also very powerful.

Moving from the perceptions of the power of God to the question of the foremost characteristics of God, while only a very few Westerners believe that God totally accepts any and all actions of persons, one-third of the Japanese believe so. In the same question, over half of

both groups stated that God demands that humans act justly. There was no consensus in either group about God's willingness to answer the prayers of the faithful, with responses spread about equally over the spectrum. It was disappointing to see that only half of the Westerners and one-fourth of the Japanese have an image of God as being willing to suffer for humanity.

The image taken from Isaiah's vision, that of God's holiness and the sinfulness of humanity --a sinfulness that cannot stand/live in the presence of God- (Isaiah 6:1-8), was rejected by both groups. Again the overwhelming perception of God was one of love and acceptance. This perception of being unconditionally loved and accepted by God was affirmed by almost the same percentages that rejected the premise that human sinfulness makes it impossible for humans to live in the Divine presence. While most of the Westerners rejected the notion that to meet God is merely to meet one's deeper self, almost half of the Japanese affirmed that image. Another disappointment to this pastor was to discover that only 15% of the Japanese and 43% of the Westerners would expect to be called into sacrificial mission if they would "see God".

We turn now to the question of the origin of evil in this world. The suggestion that evil originates in God (who as the creator of everything is, therefore, also the creator of evil) was rejected by both groups. Almost eight of ten Japanese attribute evil directly to humanity making mistakes and turning away from God. Only half of the foreigners agreed. That same half put the blame for the origin of evil on Satan as the rebellious one, but only three out of ten Japanese were willing to lay the blame there. Half of the Westerners and three-

fourths of the Japanese rejected the notion of spiritual powers and principalities other than God (Romans 8:38) being the cause of evil.

Regarding "miracles" there was strong agreement in rejecting a statement that miracles don't happen. As to just what these miracles are, there was less agreement. Both groups rejected the notion that miracles are merely natural occurrences which we do not yet understand and have nothing to do with God. Indeed, the statement that we do not yet understand the phenomenon called "miracles" was affirmed, but only with the proviso that, whatever they are, they are the workings of God.

Perceptions Of The Reality Of God. This section deals with the question of whether we perceive God to be real or merely a projection of our human unconscious, and if the former is true, whether we perceive God as singular or many. For each group, Japanese and Western, there was one response in each question which was heavily favored, with all the others being equally heavily rejected. This was the only section where this was true.

To the hypothesis, in question fourteen, that God is the one reality in existence upon which all others depend, we find strong agreement among the Westerners, with a smaller majority of the Japanese agreeing. Consistent with this response was the fact that the Western group unanimously rejected the proposition that God is merely one of many spiritual beings. The Japanese also disagreed with this statement by a four-to-one ratio. The thesis that God is the most powerful of many spiritual beings was also rejected, as was the notion that God is nothing more than what we experience when we become aware of our human

unconscious.

We come to two questions which probe more specifically into our perception of whether God is a singular being or merely one among many. To the first premise that "the gods" are merely another way to say what Christians say when talking about the Trinity, 90% of the Westerners and 63% of the the Japanese responded negatively. The suggestion that "the gods" are not real, but are merely human inventions, was also rejected. Furthermore, both groups rejected the suggestion that "the gods" are real but less powerful than God. Even the proposition that "the gods" are merely a human attempt to explain an incomplete experience of God was rejected by the Japanese, although it was accepted by a majority of Westerners. Continuing with this same line of questioning, the proposition that there are different gods for each person and country was strongly rejected by the Westerners, while the Japanese response was non-conclusive. It must be added, however, that less than one in five Japanese participants of Union Church believe that there are different gods for different people and countries. The statement that the Christian God is the most powerful of many was again rejected, as it was in questions 14 and 11, by an overwhelming majority. On the other hand, both of these church groups reacted by the same overwhelming majority in affirming the premise that there is only one God, and it is our human understandings which differ. Both groups strongly disagreed with the statement that there is only one God and all the rest of the spiritual beings are demons.

To question four, which asked about the person of Jesus Christ, it is not surprising to discover in these church groups, that there was

affirmation of Jesus as THE [i.e. one] Son of God. However, the fact that all these persons live in a culture permeated with Buddhist and Shinto teachings perhaps contributed to the somewhat lower than expected percentage of that affirmation; 66% of the Japanese, and 72% of the Westerners. The statement that Jesus is A Son of God, like Buddha, was rejected by a slightly larger margin. Statements that Jesus was one who shows us what God is like, and Jesus is God living with us in human form were both affirmed by a simple majority of the Western respondents but the Japanese responses ranged rather evenly from positive to negative.

Perceptions Of The God-Human Relationship. This section examines the question of whether there is a Divine-human relationship, and if so, its quality. The first question asks how important this God-relationship is in one's life by asking how often one brings God into consciousness each day. A high percentage, of both groups indicated that God was so important to them that they think of God each and every day. Only a very few indicated that God was rather unimportant, and they only thought of God when they were experiencing troubles they could not handle by themselves. No person of either group said that God was unimportant, or that they thought about God only rarely. Indeed, the statement that God was unimportant in the individual's daily life was soundly rejected, by over eight out of ten of the Japanese and all but one of the Westerners.

As to what difference this perceived relationship with God makes to the individual, the largest percentage responded that because of God they believe they can overcome problems and face life with hope. The

Japanese held this belief slightly more strongly than the Westerners, and coupled this with the belief that because of God they must treat others with love and respect; 66% to only 39% for the Westerners! The Westerners, because of God, expect to be loved and forgiven but, less than one in four Japanese have that expectation. The only person who felt that their perception of the Divine relationship prevented them from doing some of the things they wished to do, was a Westerner.

Because prayer is one of the most most traditional methods of implementing the Divine-human relationship, the next three questions (20, 16, and 15 -in order of evaluation) deal with prayer. In light of the fact that within this Divine-human relationship less than one in four Japanese expect to be loved and forgiven, it is surprising to find that two out of every three state that they pray to God for comfort or healing for themselves or a friend. Less than half of the Westerners state that they pray for that reason. The Japanese were negative to the suggestion that one prays in order to have God grant their requests. A simple majority of the Westerners indicated that they pray in order to have God tell them what to do, but it was very unusual for the Japanese to pray for this purpose. Likewise, while 61% of the Westerners stated that they prayed in order that God would make them into a child of God, only one in four Japanese did so.

When do persons pray? Two thirds of both groups said that they pray when they are happy, and about three fourths when they have a problem they can't solve. The suggestion that people pray when they want God to do something for them was not accepted by either group. The use of prayer to learn how God wants a person to live was affirmed by



only 30% of the Japanese and just under half of the Westerners.

To whom do persons pray? These answers, of course, are not mutually exclusive as people seem to pray in more than one way. Nine out of ten Westerners and almost eight out of ten Japanese indicated that they pray to God. Two-thirds of the Westerners and just over half of the Japanese say that they also pray to Jesus. In a Buddhist/Shinto country like Japan it is not surprising that two out of ten Japanese state that they pray to the spirits of their ancestors. What is rather surprising is that one of the Westerners does the same. That notwithstanding, prayer to one's ancestors was rejected by 98% of the Westerners and 80% of the Japanese. Three Japanese and four Westerners out of a total of just under one hundred honestly admitted that they were uncertain to whom they pray, but that their perception was that they prayed to something greater than themselves.

Throughout Judeo-Christian history runs the assertion that God has chosen special people and peoples with whom to work. Why? To the proposition that God chooses and works with special people because God loves them more than others there was a strong negative reaction, 98% of the Westerners and 78% of the Japanese. The same percentage of Westerners reject the notion that God chooses persons because they are good (and God loves good people more) but almost one in three of the Japanese believe this to be the case. Eight of ten Westerners believe that God chooses persons because God has a mission for them to perform on God's behalf and two-thirds of the Japanese agreed. This is quite interesting because in question three, which concerns humans being called into mission when one "sees God", only 15% of the Japanese and

less than half of the Westerners responded positively. There seems to be a disparity between a "general" understanding of persons being called into mission by God, and that perception having bearing on one's personal life.

Carrying this over into the question about the Genesis 12:2 text ". . . and I will make of you a great nation, I will bless you and make your name great so that you may be a blessing, . . ." the majority understood this to mean that God chose Abraham in order that God might bless others through Abraham. Both choices concerning God specially loving Abraham and/or Abraham and his descendants were rejected by more than a four to one margin. It is worthy of note that, although the majority stated that the reason God chose Abraham was in order to bless others through Abraham, there was a sound rejection of the suggestion that God chose Abraham because God expected Abraham to do something for God.

### The Second Questionnaire.

Material from the second questionnaire is presented here in the form of a comparison with the responses of the first. Therefore, in addition to internal comparisons, an evaluation will be made to determine how responses agree or disagree with those of the previous one.

The reader will recall that these responses were received after two sermons were preached on "How We See God," one giving a more traditional understanding of God from the Japanese or Eastern perspective, and one from the mainstream of Western theological perceptions. The number of responses to this second questionnaire was less than the first by almost one third but was well within expectations. Because many persons did not answer the question which asked whether they had also completed the first questionnaire, it is impossible to be certain exactly how many actually answered both, but indications (remarks about having to go through this process twice, observing persons as they placed their forms in the questionnaire box, etc.) are that the second questionnaire responders were primarily those who had also completed the first one. According to those who did answer this question there were about 15-20% new respondents. Since they would be those most likely to answer that question, perhaps this is a correct percentage.

Perceived Qualities Of God. These are the responses concerning our perception of the kind of God before whom we stand. The first

question deals with persons feelings when they think of God. It is interesting to note that in the second questionnaire the Japanese were less inclined to say that they feel no different when they think of God. Although the Japanese were also less inclined to say they felt more alive when they thought of God, the Westerners were more inclined to say so. The Japanese increased from 85% to a unanimous agreement that they feel comforted and at peace when thinking of God. The Westerners agreed though with a smaller percentage.

To a question of one's perception of the closeness and caring attitude of God, significant change was recorded by the Japanese who responded more positively to the statement that God is interested in everything they do. In spite of their previous response that they experienced God as being "close like a friend," the Japanese responded more positively the second time to the thesis that God is a life principle, with nine out of ten affirming that in the second questionnaire. In this same section the Japanese respondents also affirmed an image of God as being like a loving/interested parent. The Westerners also overwhelmingly affirmed this parental image but were less inclined to understand God as being a life principle. Both continued to reject the premise that God, the creator, no longer has an interest in humanity. It is also interesting to note that the Japanese response to the suggestion that God is like the Spirit of their Ancestors increased slightly, in the second questionnaire.

Concerning the perceived power of God, both groups responded more positively the second time to the suggestion that God is all-powerful. For the Westerners this was coupled with a stronger

affirmation of the proposition that God was "all-powerful but self limiting," and in this questionnaire more than half of the Japanese agreed. Both groups continued to reject the hypothesis that God is in competition with Satan.

To the question about the perceived characteristics of God, although there continued to be little consensus there were some rather dramatic changes. Concerning the image of God as being willing to suffer on behalf of humanity, positive responses from the Japanese increased from one in four to almost one-half of the respondents. At the same time there was a small but encouraging change away from the the idea that God is totally accepting of any and all human actions. In this round of questioning, a larger number understood God as willing to answer the prayers of the faithful.

If the above is the perceived God before whom we stand, what would happen if one actually were to experience standing before God? Although in the first questionnaire 8% of the Japanese felt they might die because of their sinful nature, in the second not one expressed that fear. On the other hand, fewer Westerners [11%] chose to cross out that response as being not applicable for them. Both groups affirmed the belief that they would experience love and acceptance upon seeing God, that response increasing to over nine in ten. To the suggestion that one would be called into sacrificial mission if one would "see God" there was another dramatic change in the Japanese response. While in the first questionnaire only 15% affirmed that proposition, in the second over one-half of the respondents did! That more than three-fold increase is viewed with gratification by this pastor. The Western

change was also quite dramatic going from less than half to over three out of four. Consistent with the above, there was less support for the proposition that to "see God" would merely be to meet one's "deeper self." It appears that God is viewed as a reality in our existence, rather than as a projection of our human unconscious.

Concerning the source of evil in this world, both groups continued to reject the suggestion that God, being the source of everything, is the cause of evil. Again both groups joined in affirming that evil comes from people who make mistakes and turn away from God. Although the Japanese affirmed this statement more strongly, it was the Westerners who increased affirmation from one in two, to two out of three. Both continued strongly to resist blaming evil on spiritual beings other than God, but in this questionnaire over half of both groups would consider doing so if that spiritual being were named Satan. While the Westerners continued just above the 50% mark in blaming Satan, the Japanese increased from 31% to 58% in positive responses to this premise. As there was nothing in either of the services of worship related to this study suggesting this possibility, the reason remains a mystery.

Regarding "miracles" as part of the Divine-human relationship, an overwhelming percentage, 97% Western and 90% Japanese, continued to reject the notion that miracles don't happen. A slightly smaller number rejected the idea that these miracles have nothing to do with God, that they are merely occurrences of a type we don't understand. A still smaller percentage, but still over two-thirds, did affirm the proposition that miracles are the working of God acting by laws we

don't understand. Over half (in the case of Western responses 70%) continued to affirm the proposition that miracles are God overcoming natural laws. The main area of consensus appears to be that miracles are real and are the working of God.

Perceptions Of The Reality Of God. This is the double question of whether God is perceived as real or merely a projection of our human unconscious, and, if God is perceived as real, whether God is perceived as many or One. While both groups reject the premise that God is merely one of many spiritual beings, the Westerners, who had done so to a person in the first questionnaire now do so only by a ratio of nine to one. The Japanese slightly increased their ratio of rejection of the premise. Both groups again rejected the notion that God is the most powerful of many gods but the margin slipped in the Western responses, dropping from 84% to 65%, while the Japanese remain almost evenly divided on this issue. When we come to the hypothesis that God is the one reality of the universe upon whom all others depend, the Western responses climbed from 92% to 97% while the Japanese fell from 63% to 52%.

Concerning the image of "the gods," who are numberless in this culture, their status, seems to appear clear only to the Westerners, who by a ratio of almost three-fourths consider them to be human attempts to explain incomplete experiences of God. The Japanese do not agree but are themselves split on this issue. Concerning the proposition that the gods are not real but merely human inventions, the Japanese were slightly more receptive to this suggestion in the second questionnaire,

while the Westerners remained unchanged. In the proposition that "the gods" are indeed real but less powerful than "God," we observe a decline in opposition in the Japanese response from more than eight out of ten, to less than seven out of ten. At the same time the Western opposition dropped from nine, to six out of ten. At the suggestion that these gods may be another expression of what Christians are trying to say when speaking of the Trinity, it is interesting to note that while Western responses remained negative, that opposition dropped from 90% to 63%. Japanese remained rather consistent in opposition by approximately two to one. From this response we can deduce that the image of "the gods" is far from dead in Japan.

This consideration continues in the next series of responses. Questions quite similar to those stated above [from question 8] were asked later in question 11, but instead of "the gods" being the specific subject, this time the topic of the question was "I believe . . ." and the question of "God" or "the gods" depended upon the formulation of the following statement. Whereas in the immediately preceding question the concept of "the gods" as being a human attempt to explain an incomplete experience of God was rejected by the Japanese, in this question the statement that there is only one God, but people differ in their understandings, was affirmed by over 85% of the Japanese respondents in both questionnaires. The Westerners affirmed this latter formulation by nine to one, but as stated above the former by approximately three-fourths. Although both responses to the suggestion that there are many "gods" but "God" is the most powerful were negative; to the statement that there is one God but many understandings of God, we find a much smaller negative



response. In addition the positive response on the part of the Japanese rose over 12% in the second questionnaire. Although in Japan there is a widely held view that, in addition to there being different gods for each place and thing there are different gods for each person and country,<sup>1</sup> often finding their expression in nationalistic terms which are unconsciously accepted by the populace,<sup>2</sup> it is interesting to note here that in the Japanese responses there was a two-fold increase in rejection this idea [26% - 58%]. Although the hypothesis that there is only one God and all the rest of the spiritual beings are demons was rejected by both groups it is interesting to note that while in the first instance there was no Japanese who opted for this opinion, in the second over one in four did so. This was greater than the Western response.

Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, called the Christ, there continued to be strong support for the concept that he is THE Son of God. The Japanese were consistent in this affirmation at just over 60% while the Western responses increased from just over 70% to almost 90%. Both groups continued to reject the proposition that Jesus was A Son of God, like Buddha. In addition, although the Westerners affirmed it, the Japanese once again rejected the suggestion that Jesus was "God with us" in human form, favoring the suggestion that Jesus was one who shows us what God is like. This response increased the second time from 43% to to three-fourths.

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1 Toshiru Mayuzumi, "Life Death and Japanese Music" (Osaka, Japan: the Mainichi Broadcasting Co.)

2 Sokyo Ono, Shinto: The Kami Way (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1962), pp. 75-81.

Perceptions Of The God-Human Relationship. In this series of questions the study is concerned with the quality, if any, of the divine-human relationship. First we deal with the degree of importance each person places on the being of God. In both questionnaires the two groups replied that God was so important to them individually that they thought of God each day. The response was in a ratio of over three to one, although the percentage dropped slightly in the second case. Interestingly, to the statement that God was rather unimportant and thought of only at times of trouble, in the second questionnaire 42% of the Japanese responded that this was true for them. A comparison of Japanese responses to these two propositions show that in the first case 74% say that God is very important to them and they think of God every day, while in the second case 42% say that God is unimportant, being brought to mind only in times of trouble. We must not be confused by the fact that the two figures add up to more than 100%, for in a country where the number of persons who "belong" to the two major religions, Shinto and Buddhism, add up to close to 140% of the total population, we must realize that we are dealing with people who do not feel uncomfortable adhering to two different ideas or groups. This is one of the differences between the Eastern and Western mindset. One fact that both groups did agree upon was that to them God was not "Unimportant being thought of only rarely," for that notion was rejected by 90% of the Japanese and 100% of the Westerners who responded.

Responding to the suggestion that a belief in God makes a difference in one's life, both groups continued to emphasize that they

believe that, because of God, they could overcome problems and live life with hope. For at least three-fourths of the Westerners who responded to this study, this continued to mean that because of God they expected to be loved and forgiven. A similar Japanese response jumped numerically from one-fourth to almost 60% in the second questionnaire. On the question of the presence of God, who according to the previous response is perceived as being loving and forgiving to people, it was surprising that the following premise, that persons must, therefore, also love and forgive others, was affirmed more strongly by the Japanese than by the Westerners! This was true in spite of the fact that it was the Westerners who held more firmly to the image of God loving people. Finally, only three people felt that they were prevented from doing things that they wanted to do because of their perception of God.

The study now moves into three questions relating to prayer as a part of the Divine-human relationship. When questioned about their reasons for praying, the greatest response in both instances was that persons prayed in order to receive comfort and/or healing for self or others. The largest change at this point was in the second Japanese response, which jumped from two thirds to 90%, while the Western response climbed 15% to 63%. The Japanese response to the concept of prayer as a vehicle to enable one to learn God's will for one's life, jumped from less than one-third in the first instance, to two-thirds in the second, while the Western response remained a constant 50%.

Concerning the question of when persons pray, for both groups, instances of difficulty or unsolvable problems were most likely to initiate prayer but times of happiness and joy also rated highly.

To the question of praying to ask God to do something for the one who prays, while the Western response remained constant at one-quarter, the Japanese response jumped from 8% to over 33%.

When asked to whom one prays, the predominant response was "to God." The Japanese response rose from the 70% to 90% while the Western group remained in the high 90th percentile. Both groups also responded that they prayed to Jesus, with the positive responses increasing in the second questionnaire. Although as might be expected, no Westerners stated that they prayed to the spirits of their ancestors, 15% of the Japanese did admit to this type of prayer. Less than one in ten from either group stated that they were unsure exactly to whom they prayed, merely praying to "something greater than themselves."

Moving to perceptions of why God chooses to work with special persons, in both groups there was overwhelming rejection of the notion that God does so because God loves those persons more than others. Both groups also continued to reject the further notions that God chooses special people because they are good and that God loves good people more than others. The Japanese rejection of this notion rose from 66% in the first to 90% the second response. Concerning a third choice which was that God chooses special persons because God has a mission for them; both groups strongly favored this response, in the second instance the Japanese 80% and Westerners 95% despite their difficulty (48% and 77%) in an earlier question [number 3] in seeing themselves being called into mission if they, personally, were to "see God."

Although the Genesis 12:2 text is foundational for our Judeo-Christian faith and therefore used as a sub-heading for the mini-sermon

series on "How We See God," it is difficult to analyze the responses to question number nineteen which deals specifically with its meaning. The only statement which garnered a positive response was that God chose Abraham in order to bless others through him. This was positive in both Western responses as well as in the second Japanese response. However, the statement that God chose Abraham because God expected him to do something for God, was rejected by both groups, despite the fact that in the question discussed immediately above, the responses were heavily in favor of the notion that God chooses persons because God has a mission for them. The rejection by both groups of the notion that God chose Abraham because God loved Abraham and/or his descendents more than other peoples was consistent with the rejection in the above set of questions.

The final question deals with an understanding of the basis of a faithful life before God. The two groups differed in their responses. The response of the Japanese was that prayer and thanksgiving to God were the primary basis of a faithful life. Two-thirds chose that answer the first time and that increased to 97% the second! The Western response dropped from 70% for the first questionnaire to 65% for the second. According to the Western response the basis for a faithful life is in seeking to do the will of God. This was affirmed by 80% and then 95% of the Westerners who responded.

Low in acceptability as the basis of a faithful life before God was the idea of working in the church and telling others of God's love in Jesus. For the former, less than 10% of either group responded favorably. For the latter choice, that of telling others of God's love in Jesus Christ, while only approximately 20% of either group chose

that, what is more noteworthy were the negative responses. The reader must remember that a negative response is one where the respondent had stated that this does not apply to them personally. In the first instance 60% of the Japanese who participated in this study (we must remember that they are the ones interested enough in the church to fill this questionnaire out) were negative to personally telling others of God's love. This negative response dropped to 25% in the second questionnaire for the Japanese and from 30% to 8% for the Westerners.

The Control Group and the Japanese of Union Church.

This section of the study is a comparison and evaluation of the responses of the control group of non-Christian Japanese respondents with those of the Japanese participants of Kobe Union Church. The purpose of this comparison is to determine areas of similarity as well as areas of significant dissimilarity between these groups of Japanese, for it is the thesis of this pastor that in discovering areas of dissimilarity, one may also discover ways suggestive of a more creative preaching ministry.

Perceived Qualities Of God. In questions related to perceptions of one's feelings before God, persons of the control group, like the church group, gave as their most frequent response that of feeling comforted and at peace. Where these two groups differed most, was in response to the suggestion that one feels alive and excited when thinking about God. While the control group's affirmation of the

suggestion that one could think of God and feel no different was similar to the church group's response to the first questionnaire, it was double that of their response to the second. Therefore it is not surprising to discover that for this control group God is not perceived to be as close as for the church group. God is experienced as being distant by 30% more of the control respondents, and in response to suggestions that God is close like a friend and interested in everything we humans do, the church group was four times more prone to say that God is interested in what we humans do.

Despite this lack of experienced closeness to God, the control group was less than half as prepared to say that God was merely a life principle to live by. Their most frequent positive response was to the statement that God is like the spirit of their ancestors, 38%, more than six times the response of the church group. Yet, though they experience God most frequently as ancestral spirit, judging from their response to the suggestion that God is like a parent, loving and interested, [76% negative] this relationship with their ancestral spirit has little personal or relational quality to it.

Concerning their perception of the power of God, only one-third of this group responded that God was all-powerful, less than half the percentage of the church group. Their most numerous response, like that of their peers in the church, was that God was all-powerful but self-limiting. On the other hand, the 40% who understood God as being limited in power was five times that of their church peers.

When queried about the foremost characteristics of God, the control group's response [68%] that God totally accepts all human

actions was more than double that of the church group. In addition the control group was less than half as willing as the church group to state that God is willing to answer prayers of the faithful, or that God is willing to suffer on behalf of humanity. To a question about whether God is concerned or demands that humans act justly toward each other, this percentage dropped to one-third that of the church group. In light of the content of Japanese religious folk literature, with its wealth of images of divine-human interaction, this is difficult to understand.<sup>3</sup>

Since there seems to be little perception of a divine demand for justice, it is not surprising that, as did their church counterparts, this group strongly rejected the notion that for a human to stand in the presence of God would mean to die. The rejection of this premise in the control group was by the greatest margin of any of the groups queried. Similarly, their expectation of experiencing love and acceptance from God was lower by half than that of their church peers. Thus it is not surprising to discover that they also were ten times less expectant of being called into mission by God, with only 4% thinking this to be a possibility. It should be added that on the first questionnaire of the Japanese in the church group only 15% thought this possible, but on the second (because of the sermon on this topic?) that percentage rose to 52%. The most frequent response (72%) of the control group to the

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3 James Fiske. See an unpublished paper, "Concepts of God in Traditional Japanese Literature As Perceived By Selected Japanese Junior High Students," submitted to the School of Theology at Claremont in the Spring of 1984. In the numerous Folk Tales reviewed, the majority of which were religious morality plays, a constant theme is that of the kami [a local god] rewarding persons for acts of consideration, honesty and/or justice.



question of what would happen if they were to "see God" was that they would discover that God is merely their "deeper" (unconscious) self. This raises the question of what, exactly, is their image of God.

Turning to the question of the origin of evil, we discover that the persons in this control group rejected [percentage wise] all the listed possibilities. Their most frequent response (48% - while their church peers opted for this response 75%) was that evil was caused by humans turning away from God and making mistakes. They strongly (76%) rejected the suggestion that evil comes from God who, as the creator of everything also created evil. Over half of them rejected the thesis that evil comes from other spiritual beings, and by almost nine to one they rejected the notion that evil comes from Satan rebelling against God. Despite this, it seems that the control persons are less ready than their Japanese church peers to lay the cause of evil on humanity.

When we turn to the question of miracles we discover that the control group holds a secular view of these phenomena, with over half stating that they are occurrences which have nothing to do with God, merely being events which we do not yet understand. This is not to say that the occurrence of "miracles" is doubted by this group, for 85% of them rejected the statement that miracles simply don't happen. Those who believe that God is somehow involved in these miracles tend to believe that God is acting according to laws of the universe which we do not yet understand, 44%, while 28% thought that God indeed was acting, by overcoming natural laws.

Perceptions Of The Reality Of God. To the questions of whether

God is real, or merely a projection of the human unconscious, and if God is real, whether God is one or many; the responses were consistent with those above. The most numerous response (56%) was that God is simply what we experience when we come into contact with the fullness of our own personal and human unconscious. This was almost five times the percentage of the church group of Japanese. On the other end of the scale, to the thesis that God is the one reality upon whom all others are dependent, we see the strongest opposition, with only 8% affirming and 85% in opposition. This is almost seven times the ratio of the church group. Concepts of God as being the most powerful of many and/or merely one of many gods were also rejected, although they were rejected by a smaller percentage than in the church group.

In the section of questions concerning perceptions of "the gods," we again discover that every proposed answer was rejected by the control group. If for no other reason than they are not familiar with the concept, it could be expected that they would reject the thesis that "the gods" are another way to say what Christians try to say with the concept of the Trinity. As there was no "positive" statement about "the gods" among the choices in this question, it comes as no surprise to discover that the control group's responses are more negative than those of their church peers.

In the next section, where there are questions reflecting a more Japanese perspective, we discover a strong positive response to the premise that there are different gods for each person and for each country. The 84% favorable response by the control group was more than four times that of their brothers and sisters in the church. Whether

the reasons are the same is impossible to say, but both groups reacted negatively by approximately the same percentage to the further suggestion that there are "many gods" but that "God" is the most powerful. Although the church group reacted favorably to the thesis that there is only one God even though people have different understandings about God, the control group rejected that by a three to two ratio. Both groups strongly rejected the notion that there is only one God and all other spiritual beings are demons; the control group to a person.

Concerning the person of Jesus, as expected the control group rejected the notion that Jesus is THE Son of God, with less than one fifth agreeing. What is noteworthy is that 16% do perceive Jesus as THE Son of God. To the question of whether or not Jesus is A Son of God, the group was split almost evenly, even though the church group rejected this by a five to one ratio. The area of most agreement was to the question of Jesus being one who shows what God is like. The 60% of the control group who picked this response was quite comparable with the 74% of the church group. As to the possibility of Jesus being "God With Us" in human form, while the 16% who affirmed this possibility was less than half the percentage of the church group, it is noteworthy when any non-Christian person makes this statement.

Perceptions Of The God-Human Relationship. With regard to whether there is a Divine-human relationship and if so what is its quality, the questioning begins by asking about the perceived importance of God in each person's life. Here we find a rather clear contrast

between the two groups. While the church group affirms the importance of God in their lives by saying they think of God every day (75%), less than half (44%) of the control group does. In addition, their most frequent response is that God is rather unimportant and they think of God only when a problem occurs (64%). Finally, while less than 3% of the church group stated thus, 16% of the control group said that God was unimportant to them and they rarely thought of God.

The presence of God as they perceive it seems to make less difference in the lives of the persons in the control group, as only half of them state that they believe God's presence makes it possible for them to overcome problems and live life with hope, while for their church counterparts, that figure is over 80%. Although they have a lower expectation of the possibility of being loved and forgiven by God themselves (30% in comparison with 60% of the church group), persons in the control group did state that because of the presence of God they believe they must, personally, love and respect others. The percentage of their response to this imperative in their lives was marginally higher than that of their church peers! In addition sixteen percent (compared to five percent of the church group) said that because of God they are prevented from doing some of the things they would otherwise do. Although this 16% is larger than the church group, those who rejected this suggestion indicating it did not apply to them also did so by a larger percentage, sixty to thirty-five percent.

Moving into the area of prayer, we discover that the most frequent response of both groups was that they prayed in order to seek to be comforted and healed. However, to the question of praying in

order to ask God to grant their request, the control group reported that they prayed for this reason by a ratio of over two to one over their church counterparts, even though only half of the persons in the group did, indeed, actually pray in this manner. Half of the church group used prayer to seek God's guidance in how to live, but only a quarter of the control group did. It was with regard to praying to ask God to make them into a child of God that we find the greatest differentiation between their prayer lives. Of the Church group, one third used prayer for this purpose, while only one person of the control group did so.

When do these persons pray? The most frequent response by both groups was that they pray when they have a problem they can't solve alone. The church group did so by about 10% less than their non-Christian counterparts, and in turn took the lead in also praying when happy (60%); of the control group only one-third prayed at times of joy. Consistent with the response in the previous question, the non-church group prayed more than twice as frequently when they wanted God to do something for them. Almost half of the group responded that they prayed at such times. On the other hand it was the church group that, by a ratio of more than four to one over the control group, prayed for guidance in how to live and work.

In questions concerning the object of one's petitions, 90% of the church group said they prayed to God, and another 70% said that they also prayed to Jesus. Not surprisingly only 8% of the Japanese said they prayed to Jesus (it is somewhat surprising that any prayed to Jesus), and less than 40% said they prayed to God. To whom, then, do they pray? Just over half said that they pray to the spirits of their

ancestors (that is four times the church group average) and 65% said that they were uncertain to whom they prayed, but prayed to "something greater than themselves."

Concerning the Christian teaching that throughout the ages God has chosen special people to work with, both groups were strong in rejecting the explanation that this is because God loves these persons more than others. The response to the propositions that God chose these persons because they are "good" and God loves good people more than others, are somewhat surprising. In the first questionnaire just under 30% of the Japanese participants in Union Church thought this to be the case. This is about the same as the control group. On the second questionnaire that percentage had dropped to 10%, putting their response in close correlation with the Westerners response. Once again we discover that it is on the thesis that God chooses special persons because God has a special mission for them to perform, that the greatest difference becomes apparent. The church group affirmed this thesis, by a three-fourths majority, which was almost eight times the percentage of the control group. When the question referred to the text used for the sermons, Gen. 12:2, the general negative response of the control group is understandable, because most of them noted that they had never read this and did not understand it. Nevertheless, just from reading the text on the questionnaire, one-third did decide that God chose Abraham because God wanted to bless others through him!

The final question concerns perceptions of the basis of a faithful life before God. The most frequent response of both groups was that a faithful life before God consists of a life of prayer and

thanksgiving. Consistent with previous responses it was the church group, by a two to one ratio, which held that seeking to do what God wants for humanity is the basis of a faithful life. Of the control group, a surprising 44% agreed. Both groups rejected the suggestion that a faithful life before God consists of telling others of God's love in Jesus Christ. For the non-Christians that response is quite understandable, but the Union Church Japanese who rejected that understanding gives pause for thought for the outreach of Union Church among the English-speaking Japanese of Kobe.

#### Analysis Of Personal Church Involvement.

This section of the project will analyze those responses concerned with the respondents' personal church involvement. These questions are found at the end of the second questionnaire. It is the aim of this section of the study to discover whether such factors as church attendance, financial contributions, work within the church program, and work outside the church body [but work done "because one is a Christian] are interrelated. It is worthy of note that respondents were less inclined to complete all the questions of this section than they had been on the first part of the questionnaire. Often only one or two of the questions were completed.

This section originally had a second purpose, which was to correlate the findings of this section with the responses to questions specifically concerned with images of God. The purpose was to determine whether different images of God influenced the way in which persons

participated in the organizational life of the church. Comparisons were made to determine whether there was a significant difference in church involvement in its various aspects based upon the images of God which are held. Comparisons were also made to analyze responses concerning whether persons imaged God as one or as many (question 14a, compared with 14b and c); regarding an image of God as "God" compared to "one's deeper self" (questions 7a and 14a as compared to 3d and 14d); the perceived distance or nearness of God (questions 2b and c, as well as 10a compared with 2a and d, and 10c); images of God as "God" rather than as one's "Ancestral Spirits" (questions 5d and 15a as compared with 5c and 15c); questions concerning whether persons believe that God demands justice of humans, or whether one believes that God accepts any and all human actions equally (questions 6c and 3a, as compared with 6a and 3b); and finally the question of whether God is merely one's "deeper self" or a reality who calls human persons into mission (question 14a compared with 14b and c). After much charting and comparing no recognizable differences were found which could correlate individual church involvement with the images of God gathered in this study.

This lack of correlation lessens the impact of the data gathered in the section concerning individual church involvement, nevertheless, that material is summarized in this section as this is still vital information for this church and plays an important part in the questionnaires.

Attendance information and comparisons. The responses were divided into "attenders," those who indicated they attended either every



week or usually, and "non-attenders," all other persons. Of those who responded to this section of the questionnaire 80% were attenders. When this is broken down into Western and Japanese participants, 87% of the Westerners and 55% of the Japanese, were regular attenders. Of the Western attenders there was an incidence of involvement in all areas of the church life in a ratio of five to one. Of the non-regular attenders there was still an involvement ratio of two to one. The Japanese who are regular attenders were evenly split when it came to the overall total involvement in the church program. However, when we look at the figures of those who are not regular attenders we see that only approximately one-third are involved in the church program. Of the total group, less than half either tithe or give more than twenty thousand yen per month (approximately \$1,000 per year), 49% do and 51% do not. Of that portion who are regular attenders, the number of persons who either tithe or give 20,000 yen exactly reverses that figure, but of those who do not attend regularly the figure drops to 45% who do and 55% who don't. It is in the area of involvement where the difference is most clearly seen. Of those who are regular attenders 82% are also involved in other activities of the church program, of those who are not regular attenders only 37% are also involved in the ongoing church program outside of worship. In the areas of involvement outside the internal church program this difference is also dramatic. For those who are regular attenders 88% are involved outside the church because of their Christian commitment, and of those who do not attend worship regularly the split is even.

Church Involvement Information Comparisons. Criteria for "church involvement" was an affirmative response to one or more of the program choices listed in question number two of this section. No attempt was made to verify that answer, the response being left entirely up to the respondent. It is worthy of note that this involvement is not necessarily that of leadership, where especially second language persons would, perhaps, feel at a disadvantage [although many of Union Church's finest leaders are and always have been second language persons, specifically Japanese]. It was interesting to discover that the percentages were exactly the same for each part of this comparison. Of the group 69% were involved and 17% were not. Of those who were involved 69% tithed or gave over 20,000 yen per month, and of those who were not involved in the church program only 41% did so. The same percentages held for the consideration of work outside the church and church attendance. If we look at the figures of involvement for the Westerners compared to those of the Japanese we find that of the Westerners, 82% are involved in some part of the ongoing church program while for the Japanese the figure stands at 50%.

Involvement Outside The Church Body. This response includes both "witnessing" the faith to others outside the church body, and any and all work done in the community, irrespective of what may be said about one's faith, but "because one is a follower of Christ." Of the total group 83% indicated that they are so involved. Of the Westerners 94% indicated they are involved in conscious work outside the church and of the Japanese 60% responded that they also are. In evaluating what

effect this work might have on other aspects of their Christian life we discover that of those who indicate that they are involved outside the church 83% are tithers, but of those who are not so involved only 45% are. As might be anticipated of those who are also involved outside the church 85% are also involved inside the church while only 45% of those not involved are. This same percentage holds for church attendance.

Levels Of Financial Contribution. Contributions to the church have been mentioned repeatedly in this discussion, but at this point they will be examined to determine whether they are a causal factor rather than merely an effect of other factors. Of the total of those who responded 49% stated that they either tithed or gave more than 20,000 yen per month (\$1,000 per year). As incomes here vary greatly according to age, a tithe could be a much larger or smaller figure than the 20,000 yen per month. What is intended by these two figures is an indication of a commitment to giving through the church. Of the Westerners 67% said that they tithe/gave 20,000 yen but when we turn to the Japanese respondents that figure drops to only 10%. Nine out of ten of the Japanese responded that they give less than that figure.

Of those who stated that they tithe, 94% indicated that they were also involved in work outside the church. In addition 76% of those who responded that they do not tithe also stated that they are so involved. Turning to attendance we see that tithing does not seem to make much difference in Sunday attendance as 78% of the non-tithers and 82% of the tithers indicated that they attend worship regularly. Only in the area of involvement in the church program was there a noticeable

difference as 82% of the tithers stated that they are so involved, but only 65% of the non-tithers.

It would appear from these results that, at least for this group of persons, tithing is a result of being involved in the ongoing program of the church rather than a reason to become involved in it.

#### An Evaluation Of The Preaching Ministry.

This section of the paper will examine whether there is a discernible difference in the responses of those who heard both sermons in the mini sermon series, and those who did not. The responses of those who heard only one of the sermons are not included in this tabulation. The examination will concentrate especially on areas of distinct difference between the two responses. It was surprising to discover that although there was a proportionate distribution of Japanese and Westerners in both groups evaluated here, the responses of those who heard neither of the sermons tended to follow closely those of the Japanese responses to the second questionnaire, and the responses of those who heard both of the sermons tended to follow very closely those of the Western responses to that same questionnaire. They generally followed within 15-20% and often within 5%. This was quite unexpected, and as non-attendance at this well publicized mini-series could mean a general habit of non-churchgoing, it could also indicate a relationship between the effects of regular as opposed to non-regular attendance at worship.

Concerning one's feelings when thinking of God, those who heard

neither sermon felt, to a person, comforted and at peace, while less than one in nine of those who attended did. On the other hand, it was those who attended who reacted strongly against the statement that one could think of God and feel no different while less than one-third of their counterparts did. Those who attended experienced God as being closer and more interested in their lives than those who did not. Of those who missed the series one-third experienced God to be like their Ancestral Spirits while none of the attenders did.

Concerning the perceived power of God, every person not at the series considered God to be all-powerful but self-limiting; nine of ten of those attending the series did. At this point the non-attenders did vary from the response of the Japanese in the second questionnaire, as only 60% of the Japanese image God in this manner. It is also interesting to note that those who did not attend the series were more than twice as open to believe that God is willing to answer the prayers of the faithful, while their counterparts were more open to understand God as being willing to suffer on behalf of humanity. When asked what they would expect if one could "see God," those not at the series were in total agreement that they would be called into sacrificial service! Less than seven of ten of their attending peers thought so! In both cases the majority of these responses were second choice responses. This was another point where the non-attenders deviated from the previous Japanese response where less than six out of ten expected to be called into mission.

Responses concerning the origin of evil were similar except that those who did not attend the series were more than three times as

willing to attribute the origin of evil to God as the creator of all. In the area of miracles, these same persons were more prone to understand these occurrences as God intervening by overcoming natural laws. While this was true of both groups, the non-attenders' percentage (83%) exceeded all others.

When questioned about the reality of God, those who attended the series were almost twice as prone as their peers who did not attend, to image God as the one reality from which all others receive their being. The non-attenders image God as the most powerful of many gods. In this response these non-attenders were almost twice as prone to understand God thus than their Japanese peers in the second questionnaire. Sixteen percent of the non-attenders image God as merely one of many gods while none of their peers did. Those who attended were almost three times as willing to state that "the gods" are merely human inventions but less willing to formulate an image of the gods as similar to what Christians are attempting to say with the formula of the Trinity. Those who did not attend were over five times as willing to state that there are different gods for each country and person as were their peers who attended the series. When asked about Jesus, those not attending the series considered Jesus as "A Son of God" by a ratio of over six to one over those who attended. Not surprisingly the attenders by a nine to one ratio stated that Jesus is "The Son of God." One-half of the non-attenders did. Again it was those who attended who consider Jesus as "God among us in human form," while only 15% of the non-attenders did.

Those who attended responded four to three that they thought of God each day and were almost unanimous in rejecting the premise that God

is so unimportant that they rarely think of God. Sixteen percent of the non-attenders rarely think of God. Despite this 83% of the non-attenders (the largest percentage of any group responding) stated that because of God they expect to be loved and forgiven. Yet it is in this same group that sixteen percent feel inhibited from doing things they want to do because of their image of God.

Concerning reasons for praying, the non-attenders were unanimous in stating that they prayed for comfort and/or healing for themselves or others. Less than two-thirds of their attending peers prayed for this purpose. The attenders were more prone to pray when they have problems that they can't solve and for the purpose of trying to discern God's will for their lives. While both groups were unanimous in praying to God, 16% of the non-attenders also prayed to the spirits of their ancestors. None of the attenders did.

Concerning God's reasons for choosing to work with special people, those not at the sermon series were over five times as prone to give God's special love for these persons as the reason. Only two of their counterparts did. While both groups strongly affirmed the thesis that God chooses persons because God has a mission for them, the non-attenders did so to a person! Yet on the next question not one non-attender stated that God chose Abram because God had a task for him. Nine of ten of the attenders did.

One hundred percent of the non-attenders understand the basis of a faithful life as prayer and thanksgiving to God, while only two out of three of the attenders do. While only twenty percent of the attenders understand a faithful life before God in terms of sharing what God has

done in Jesus Christ, not one of the non-attenders opted for this stance.

A subtle but definite difference in images and attitude is brought to light in this comparison. The final chapter will summarize that and other findings.



## CHAPTER VI

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Function Of Images In The Faith.

The various methods by which we picture reality and our place in it, help us form a basis from which to evaluate all that happens around us. Images are one of the ways by which we are able to collect information and analyze its contents in relation to our individual and group self-understanding. This is what the Biblical writers accomplished by imagery. They used it to relate the life experience and situation of humanity to the Divine through the image of God's Mighty Acts.<sup>1</sup> Our images greatly affect our experience of God, which in turn reshapes the images and our subsequent experience. Walter Bruggemann in discussing the political nature of many images of God states that since we are all "made in the image of some God, . . . perhaps we have no more important theological investigation than to discern in whose image we have been made."<sup>2</sup> That is one of the prime purposes of this study. However, as we attempt this we would do well to heed the warning of Henri Nouwen not to assume that the image which we have discovered or the experience we have had must be the one image good and valid for all people in all

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1 V.H. Kooy "Image, Imagery," in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962) II, 681-2.

2 Walter Bruggemann, The Prophetic Imagination (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978)

times. This is an important caution to all who have had a very intense experience of God. It is a warning to be open to the possibility that what is, or seems, so right for us, is not necessarily the only way or image by which others must also formulate their lives.<sup>3</sup> This is the second purpose of this paper, to explore the thesis that the reality of God is so vast and great that no set of images, much less any single image, is capable of exhausting that reality. It is in this context that this chapter now summarizes the findings of this study and makes some modest proposals for making the preaching ministry of Union Church, Kobe, more effective.

#### Areas of Similarity and Dissimilarity.

Areas of Similarity. This section will summarize some of the areas of similarity between the Japanese and Western members of the congregation for the purpose of stating those images and beliefs where our agreement is such that it can act as the glue which binds us during those times when we face our differences.

From this study it is clear that both groups of persons affirm the importance of God in their daily lives, as this is the prime reason stated for our gathering together in weekly worship. In addition, there is strong affirmation that this God is a loving God who, like a parent, is concerned for the well-being of individuals. Because of this belief

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<sup>3</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen Reaching Out (New York: Doubleday, 1973) p. 76.

in the presence of God, members of all parts of this congregation stated that they are able to deal with the problems they encounter, and face life with hope. It is encouraging for this pastor that although most state a belief in one God, they at the same time posit a recognition and acceptance of the fact that different persons have understandings of this God at variance with their own. This is a quality of image upon which to build understanding, not only in our relations with those outside our congregation, but also as we face the differing images within, for this image of God implies that no one person or group of persons can adequately define that God. From such an image dialogue can begin.

Judging from the change in responses between the first and second questionnaires, there is a growing consensus, perhaps because of the sermons in the mini-series, that we here in Union Church are called to participate in God's mission in history, a growing awareness that to "see God," that is, to experience God in one's own life, is to be made aware that God has a place for each of us to be engaged in that historic mission. That this statement itself is a theological stance is well recognized. However, it is also recognized as the historical stance not only of the Christian faith but also of Union Church.

Needless to say, since those who responded to this questionnaire are primarily those who populate our corporate worship, another area of consensus concerns the importance of worship in our lives. Because worship is important for us we gather to thank and praise God, as well as to discover God's will for our lives. An additional area of high agreement is in the affirmation that, whether it be through natural laws

which we do not [yet] understand, or by the overcoming of understood natural laws, God does participate in human life and activity in ways which are sometimes described as "miraculous." One last area of consensus concerns prayer. It is evident that there are many understandings and practices of prayer, but prayer itself was affirmed as an important activity, an affirmation which is borne out in the weekly life of this congregation.

If these are images upon which there is agreement, what are those images in which there is less agreement or actual disagreement?

Areas of Dissimilarity. The area of greatest dissimilarity in this entire study, was found in the comparison of the control group with the Christian groups in the congregation. Since that is covered in the section beginning on page 63, it will not be reviewed here except to call attention to the fact that by being aware of this difference, one can better understand and appreciate the rather small differences which exist within the two congregational groups. That is to say, although differences in the images of the Japanese and Western members of Union Church may seem rather large at certain points, when seen in light of the differences of the images held by persons outside and inside the congregation, one realizes that they are comparatively minimal.

Another important finding is that the difference between the responses of the Japanese and Westerners decreased from the first to the second questionnaire. While in the first questionnaire the group of Japanese in Union Church formed what may be described as a bridge between the Westerners and the Japanese control group, in the second,

this Japanese group within the church responded even more like the Western group and moved further away from the responses of their peers outside the church.

Just what this means is less clear. It is inevitable that the Japanese members of a Western-oriented congregation would begin to think more like those with whom they associate. Yet at the same time, judging from Western responses (granted a minority but still responses one would tend not to find in churches in North America or Europe) stating that God is the most powerful of many gods, or "the gods" are real but less powerful than God, we see that the influence extends both ways.

It is also important that, although the responses of the Japanese group shows distinct movement and change, there is still a very distinctive "Japaneseness" which remains constant. This is as it should be, for, far from being threatened because we do not all think alike or hold exactly the same images, this distinctiveness offers an opportunity for us to learn from one another. If we are not so willing to learn from our various images of God, there is little purpose in worshipping together in an international church. We are those who have allowed ourselves to be bound together in Christ in this particular congregation of persons from many cultures and countries. Therefore we must also be those who allow each other to come into this relationship bringing our whole selves. For the Japanese in the congregation this means that they remain Japanese, just as for the Westerners it means remaining Western. Yet it is the purpose of our international congregation that the content of our "Japaneseness" and "Westernness" be expanded beyond that which we experienced when we worshipped only with persons of our native

country.

It is in this context that we acknowledge the many areas of dissimilarity between us. For example, although both groups within the church affirm the importance of God to each of them, the Japanese report that they do not experience the closeness of God that the Westerners report. Indeed, almost half of those Japanese state that they think of God only in times of trouble. Although all the Japanese state that to think of God brings them a sense of peace, many state that they don't have an image of God as being concerned for their daily affairs. Perhaps this is one reason that some of them continue to pray to the spirits of their ancestors, who are understood by Japanese to be quite interested in the daily activities of those still living.

The Japanese also report that they are less inclined to hold an image of God as the one reality in creation upon which all others depend, reporting instead that they understand "the gods" also to be independent spiritual beings who are less powerful than God. Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, many Japanese understand him not as being the one Son of God, the traditional Christian formulation, but, rather, a Son of God like Buddha.

Finally, an interesting, from a sociological point of view, attitude toward God held by many of the Japanese is one called in Japanese "Amae."<sup>4</sup> Toward God this means an image that God will accept an individual's actions no matter what that person does or how that person acts. It is acceptance without judgment. It is also the

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<sup>4</sup> Takeo Doi. The Anatomy of Dependence (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1973)

attitude of a spoiled child toward its indulgent parents who never require the child to be responsible for its actions. According to the responses received, this image is still alive for some Japanese in the congregation, however, when this attitude is compared with that of the control group, then tabulated for the first and second questionnaires, it is seen to decrease. In its place is a growing image of an individual's responsibility before God as well as one's experience of being loved and accepted by God.

#### Images and the Preaching Ministry.

The single most unexpected finding of this study is that, after all the comparisons were finished, no correlation appeared between the images of God that the members of the congregation hold and their participation within the congregational life of the church. As stated in chapter one, it was the hypothesis of this pastor that there are significant differences in the images held by the Japanese and Western members of Union church, and that these images influence the way these persons understand and, therefore, act upon the preaching ministry of the church. The former portion of the hypothesis was proven to be at least partially true; but the latter, that these images influence the manner in which a person acts upon that preaching ministry in Union Church, could not be substantiated. This is important because it means that other causes must be sought for the rather significant differences in the way the two groups act within the church.

To state that this difference stems from the quite diverse

cultures of the persons involved is to beg the question. The examination of the images of the Japanese and Westerners of Union Church was an attempt to get behind this cultural mask and discover some of the content of that cultural difference. Perhaps all that can be said at this point is that inter-cultural interaction within the church, and of course that means exposure to the preaching ministry as well as other relationships, is one effective way to deal with this difference. Because of this study, this pastor is beginning to suspect that an individual's images of God are born in and nurtured out of one's communal experience, being formed well before becoming clearly [and abstractly] formulated, and then, in turn, bringing the weight of their own influence on the manner in which a person processes the experience of his/her daily life. Therefore, in the life of Union Church, this communal experience must receive as close attention as the preaching ministry. They must be consistent if personal and corporate growth is to take place.

To cite only one example, in the area of financial giving the Westerners tend to give much more generously than the Japanese members do. However, this statement is true only as long as it remains a general statement. When one looks at individuals who have been in the congregation for an extended length of time, the Japanese members tend to give in a proportion which is closely comparable to the Western members. Therefore, perhaps it is exposure to a new culture and its expectations, rather than images of God which bring about change.

As stated earlier, although there were proportionate numbers of Japanese and Westerners in each group, the group of respondents who did



not attend the sermon series made responses remarkably similar to the responses of the Japanese group to the second questionnaire. Those who attended both sermons in the series, on the other hand, made responses remarkably like the Western response to the second questionnaire.

This pastor does not know how to interpret these data. One possibility is the above stated thesis of longevity within the faith. Among the Western members of the congregation there is a much longer history of church attendance than among the Japanese. However, among the Japanese with a longer history of church attendance, the difference is significantly reduced. Although it is impossible to substantiate from the replies to this study, non-attendance at the sermon series may indicate a general lack of church attendance. If this is the case, it may indicate that regular attendance at Christian worship over an extended period of years forms certain attitudes and images of God. From this one may go on to postulate that whether Japanese or Western, length of time in and faithfulness in worship may correlate with images of God. Judging from the changing responses of the Japanese members (control group to the first and then the second responses to the questionnaire) and finally the Western responses, prolonged and regular attendance in worship services, exposure to the total preaching ministry, and participation in the corporate body of Union Church, have been influential in forming and reforming images and beliefs of the membership of this congregation.

Needs And Proposals for a More Effective Preaching Ministry.

Needs. A reading of the replies to the questionnaires; the responses marked "other," as well as talks with many of the members of the congregation, brings to light the need for more inclusive images of God to be articulated in the preaching ministry and life of the church. Images are needed which do not, of themselves, exclude or depreciate other images merely because those other images are different. Images are needed which make people willing to be instructed by other images and grow with or from them, images which are not built upon fear of "the other." Therefore, there is a need for images which affirm self and the community, and which are accepting and affirming of those outside the covenant community as well. One discussion that has taken place in the congregation during this project, beginning from a further sermon based on the book of Revelation, is of an image of a revenging God, as opposed to a longsuffering God who never loses the desire to re-establish the broken covenant. From this discussion it is clear that much more needs to be done to assist persons to move from vengeful images of God toward loving images, images which both affirm persons and assist those persons to affirm and love others.

There is also a need for more challenging images to be presented, images which challenge the community and individuals therein to be more God-like, as we know God in Jesus Christ, rather than allowing ourselves to define God in our own image. These images are needed as a balance to the affirming images which, if not checked, tend to become self-serving.

This includes realistic images of being called into mission as those people who, to some degree, have already "seen God" and therefore have been claimed by God for God's work among humanity. The challenge to experience God personally and not rely entirely on others must also be a part of preaching. A participant in a Japanese language discussion group held at Union Church during the course of this study, said "one of the differences between Japanese and Western churches is that the Japanese people 'idolize' the minister and have less of a relationship with God themselves. The minister is by far the most important factor in a Japanese congregation." This was seconded by another Japanese member, a professor of theology at a nearby Christian Seminary, who said, "even in discussions of our worship service, the climax is always the minister's sermon." If God is to be experienced as other than "majestic but distant" this reliance on others must change.

Proposals. The first proposal is to build into the preaching ministry and educational program of the church the kind of continuing discussion begun by this study. This may be difficult to initiate, but the possible benefits appear worth it. In a discussion with the church secretary, a Japanese woman, she said, "Answering those questions was a good exercise for me as I had to think about questions which I don't usually think about. But the more I thought, the more difficult it became. Still I am glad to have this opportunity to think about my images of God."

Henri Nouwen has written:

"...we can become more aware of the different poles between which our lives vacillate and are held in tension. These poles offer the context in which we can speak about the spiritual life, because they can be recognized by anyone who is striving to live a life in the Spirit of Jesus Christ." 5

Although Nouwen is speaking of poles of relationships, our images of God form another set of poles of tension around which we can speak of our experience of God. This has proven to be true at Union Church. As a congregation we have experienced tensions when we honestly exposed our images of God, for we soon discovered that associates hold quite different images which they vigorously defend. However, the proposal for a continuation of this discussion is encouraged by evidence that this project has already borne fruit; growth, openness, and discussion continue.

Within this discussion care must be paid to the legitimization of differences through an open attitude of acceptance and love. We must recognize our cultural, denominational, racial and other backgrounds, and "celebrate" all we are able to learn from each other. This legitimization of differences can be expanded by further exploration into the Eastern theological arena, with more emphasis upon Japanese theologians and on the lives of Japanese Christians. The saying of the Johanne Jesus, "In my Father's house are many rooms . . ." (John 14:2), can be interpreted to mean that there is a diversity and variety in heaven toward which we can all grow. This image legitimizes diversity on earth.

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5 Nouwen. p. 10.

We all know each other here in Union church. We first knew and loved each other and then began to discover our differences. This, too, is a methodology for ministry. Rather than first testing each other's theology to see whom we can trust and befriend, the proper course is to determine first to love, and then to celebrate the richness of our differences which we later discover. In order to provide a proper theological foundation to accomplish this, the preaching ministry must continue to encourage persons to understand this process of continually changing images as a part of the growth process of the Journey of Faith. The study has shown a tremendous difference in persons. Stated in terms of the image of the Journey of Faith, we are at vastly different points on that journey. One person wrote (in the "other" category of the questionnaire) of a sense of failure to perceive God anywhere in his/her life, but also of "hanging in there" hoping. Thomas Merton reminds us that "no one can seek God ["hang in"] without having first been found by [God]."<sup>6</sup> This insight that we continue, despite our fear of failure to find God, precisely because we have been, to some degree, already claimed by God, is important. Images that proclaim this faith, give hope to those in the congregation who most need it, and are an essential element of a vital preaching ministry for Union Church.

#### Concluding Statement.

What has come through this study is an increased belief that

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Merton, The Silent Life (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1956), p.vii.

overriding all other considerations must be the recognition of the greatness of God and our limited human visions and images. Nothing we can imagine can encompass the glory, the mystery, the being of God. Therefore, any time we claim exclusiveness (i.e. that our image alone is correct), or all-inclusiveness (i.e. that our image says all there is to say), or infallibility (i.e. that our image is correct in each and every part), we become idolatrous. God is beyond our mortal understanding, "beyond our heart and mind, beyond our feelings and thoughts, beyond our expectations and desires, and beyond all the events and experiences that make up our life. Still God is in the center of all of it."<sup>7</sup> Such a God cannot be defined, much less limited to our images. To be faithful to God we must continually be open to be instructed by the images of others in order to be led closer to an adequate relationship with God.

That this is true in our relationships with those outside the covenant relationship as well becomes clear when we look at Christian history. In writing of the assimilation of materials of Near Eastern religions into the Jewish canon, John Cobb, Jr. writes "Israel's adoption of materials from other cultures also involved their transformation,"<sup>8</sup> bringing the material within the images of the faith of Israel, so to speak, in order that all might accept it. He goes on to say that Clement of Alexandria identified Greek philosophy as "having played in the Greek world the schoolmaster role which in the Jewish world had been played by the Law."<sup>9</sup> Cobb then writes: "It seems that

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<sup>7</sup> Nouwen. p.90.

<sup>8</sup> John Cobb, Jr., Beyond Dialogue (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p.2.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.5.

the victory of the church over paganism was in part due 'to the rule that the Christians assimilated pagan ideas, while pagans do not appropriate Christian ones.'<sup>10</sup> This seems to be the proper attitude in a Union Church here in Japan to initiate dialogue, not only within the confines of its membership but perhaps to dare look beyond those confines and learn of God from the inhabitants of this land which has its own long and rich religious tradition. The recognition that the images of others may contain truths about God which ours do not, does not detract from the validity of our own. To be most helpful to persons who are often struggling with their own faith-images while temporarily located in this non-Christian environment, the preaching ministry of the church must be open to learn from all persons. Rather than dogmatic closed-mindedness, a most helpful attitude is one of dialogue and mutual learning from each other. In this way our images of God can be enriched, enabling us as a union church congregation better to fulfill our task of nurturing our growing images and relationship with God, in order more creatively to share these images, and, therefore, the Good News we know in Jesus Christ, with those around us.

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10 Ibid., p.6. The quotation within this quote is from Arnaldo Momigliano, "Pagan and Christian Historiography in the Fourth Century A. D." in The Conflict Between Paganism And Christianity In The Fourth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 87.

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A P P E N D I X

## APPENDIX A.

## THE QUESTIONNAIRES

This appendix contains samples of the questionnaires used for this project.

On page 101 is a sample of the questionnaire sent to members of union churches in Japan to gather images from which to construct the other questionnaires.

On page 102 is a sample of the first questionnaire used in this study.

On page 106 is a sample of the final page of the second questionnaire. Because the first three pages of the two questionnaires are identical, only the final page of the second is included here.

This is the form sent to persons in union churches in Japan to help formulate questions for the two questionnaires used in this project.

### QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is an attempt to better understand the differences [if any] in the images and concepts of God which are held by Japanese and Western participants of Union Churches in Japan. We would very much appreciate it if you would respond to the following questions as thoughtfully as possible. Please return your completed questionnaire immediately to the designated person responsible. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Nationality\_\_\_\_\_ Sex\_\_\_\_\_ Age\_\_\_\_\_ Native Language\_\_\_\_\_

Years in the church\_\_\_\_\_ Member? Yes No (Circle one)

Profession (Optional) \_\_\_\_\_

1. Various words that come to mind when I think of God are:

2. "To me God is . . ." (Complete in 3 or 4 sentences)

3. My image of God is . . .

4. When I think of God (or experience God) I feel . . .

5. If I had to discuss the difference between "the gods" and "God" I would say . . .

## QUESTIONNAIRE CONCERNING IMAGES OF GOD

[May 12, 1985]

This questionnaire is an attempt to better understand the images and concepts of God which we have. We would appreciate it if you would answer the following questions thoughtfully and return it as soon as possible in the enclosed envelope. Thank you.

Fill in the blank or circle the correct answer.

Nationality \_\_\_\_\_ Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ Native Language \_\_\_\_\_  
 Are you a Christian? Yes, No. Parents Christian? Yes, No. Raised in a Christian home? Y, N  
 Number of years attending Kobe Union Church \_\_\_\_\_ Number of years in other churches \_\_\_\_\_

I became a Christian because \_\_\_\_\_

Job or profession \_\_\_\_\_

## QUESTIONS

Please indicate what YOU think. There are NO right/wrong answers, merely YOUR answers.  
 List in ORDER OF PREFERENCE [1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.] CROSS OUT those which do NOT APPLY.

## 1. When I think of God I feel:

- A. Disturbed because of the way I am living \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Comforted and at peace \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Excited and alive \_\_\_\_\_
- D. No different from usual \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. To me God is:

- A. Majestic but distant from me \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Always close at hand like a friend \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Interested in everything I do \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Uninterested in my daily activities \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other \_\_\_\_\_

## 3. I believe that if I were to "see God," I would:

- A. Die because God is holy and I am a sinner \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Experience acceptance and love from God \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Be called myself into sacrificial mission \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Discover God is merely my "deeper" (unconscious) self \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other \_\_\_\_\_

## 4. I believe that Jesus is:

- A. THE Son of God \_\_\_\_\_
- B. A Son of God, like Buddha etc. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. One who shows us what God is like \_\_\_\_\_
- D. God living with us in human form \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other \_\_\_\_\_

## 5. To me God is:

- A. A Life Principle to live my life by \_\_\_\_\_
- B. The Creator but not interested in humanity \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Like the Spirit of my ancestors \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Like a parent (Mother/Father) lovingly interested in people \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other \_\_\_\_\_

## 6. To me the foremost characteristic of God is:

- A. A total acceptance of anything that humans do \_\_\_\_\_
- B. A willingness to answer prayers of the faithful \_\_\_\_\_
- C. A concern/demand that humans act in ways that are just \_\_\_\_\_
- D. A willingness to suffer for humanity \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other \_\_\_\_\_

## 7. I believe that God is:

- A. All powerful: there is nothing God can't do \_\_\_\_\_
- B. All powerful: but self limiting to give humans freedom \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Limited in power: unable to do some things \_\_\_\_\_
- D. In competition with "Satan" who is also very powerful \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other \_\_\_\_\_

## 8. I believe that "the god"s are:

- A. Another way to say what Christians say when they  
talk of "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Nonexistant; just human inventions \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Real, but less powerful than God \_\_\_\_\_
- D. A human attempt to explain an incomplete experience of God \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other \_\_\_\_\_

## 9. Because of God, I believe that I:

- A. Can overcome problems and face life with hope \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Can expect to be loved and forgiven \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Must treat others with love and respect \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Am prevented from doing some of the things I want to do \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other \_\_\_\_\_

## 10. To me God is:

- A. Very important, I think of God often each day \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Rather unimportant, I think of God only  
when I experience trouble \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Unimportant, I rarely think about God \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Other \_\_\_\_\_

## 11. I believe that:

- A. There are different gods for each person and country \_\_\_\_\_
- B. There are many gods but the Christian God is the most  
powerful of all the gods. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. There is only one God even though people have different  
understandings about God. \_\_\_\_\_
- D. There is only one God, all the rest are demons \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other \_\_\_\_\_

12. Evil in the world comes from:

- A. God, since God is the creator of everything \_\_\_\_\_
- B. People "making mistakes" by turning away from God \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Spiritual Powers and Principalities other than God \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Satan, who rebelled and rebels against God \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other \_\_\_\_\_

13. Concerning "miracles" [such as healing by prayer] I believe that:

- A. Miracles don't happen \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Miracles do happen and are God "overcoming" natural laws \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Miracles are God acting within "greater laws of nature" which we have not yet learned to understand \_\_\_\_\_
- D. So called "miracles" have nothing to do with God and are merely occurrences we don't understand \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other \_\_\_\_\_

14. God is:

- A. THE ONE reality in existence upon which all others depend \_\_\_\_\_
- B. The most powerful of many spiritual beings \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Merely one of many spiritual beings \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Simply what we experience when we come into contact with the fullness of our own personal and human unconscious \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other \_\_\_\_\_

15. When I pray I usually direct my prayer to:

- A. God \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Jesus \_\_\_\_\_
- C. The Spirits of my dead ancestors \_\_\_\_\_
- D. I am uncertain to whom I pray, I just pray to "something greater than myself" \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other \_\_\_\_\_

16. I usually pray when:

- A. I am happy about something \_\_\_\_\_
- B. I have a problem that I can't solve \_\_\_\_\_
- C. I want God to do something for me \_\_\_\_\_
- D. I want to know where/how God wants me to work and live \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other \_\_\_\_\_

17. God chooses and works with special people because:

- A. God loves them more than others \_\_\_\_\_
- B. They are good and God loves good people more than others \_\_\_\_\_
- C. God has a particular job/mission for them to do \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Other \_\_\_\_\_

18. The basis of a faithful life before God is:

- A. Prayer and Thanksgiving to God \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Seeking to do what God calls us to do \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Working and helping in the church \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Telling others about God's love in Jesus Christ \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other \_\_\_\_\_

19. The text from Genesis 12:2, "and I will make of you a great nation, I will bless you, and make your name great so that you may be a blessing," means:

- A. God especially loves Abraham and Abraham's descendents \_\_\_\_\_
- B. God especially loved Abraham but not necessarily all  
Abraham's descendents \_\_\_\_\_
- C. God expects Abraham to do something for God \_\_\_\_\_
- D. God established a relationship with Abraham in order to  
bless others through Abraham. \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other \_\_\_\_\_

20. I pray because I want God to:

- A. Grant my request \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Comfort and heal me \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Tell me what to do \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Make me into God's child \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

A. Three (3) words/images that come to mind when I think of God are:

A. \_\_\_\_\_ B. \_\_\_\_\_ C. \_\_\_\_\_

B. My personal PRIMARY experience of God is "God as": \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your time, you have contributed toward a more effective church ministry. I hope you have also gained insight into your own images of God. Please return this form to the church in the enclosed envelope. Thank you again.



## CHURCH PARTICIPATION

(Circle the letter next to the appropriate response.)

1. I attend Sunday Worship:  
A. Every Week B. Usually C. Occasionally D. In rotation with other churches E. Seldom
2. In addition to the Sunday Worship service I am involved in: (Circle EACH correct response)  
A. A church office, B. A Commission, C. The music program, D. Office or staff work,  
E. Child Care, F. Christian Education program, G. Small groups of study or prayer,  
H. Publicity and photographs, I. Pot luck dinners, J. Other \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Excluding Sunday Worship, I spend approximately \_\_\_\_\_ hours per week in church service.
4. My financial contribution to the church is: (Circle the letter next to your response)  
A. Whatever the Lord leads me to give when I attend  
B. I am a tither, giving 10% of my income.  
C. I am a percentage giver and give \_\_\_\_\_% of my income.  
D. I pledge regularly: [If so please indicate the approximate amount below.]  
a. 0-\$5,000 per month d. \$20,001 - \$35,000 per month  
b. \$5,001 - \$10,000 per month e. \$35,001 - \$50,000 per month  
c. \$10,001 - \$20,000 per month f. \$50,001 - or above per month  
E. My giving has \_\_\_\_\_ has not \_\_\_\_\_ increased over the last three years.
5. Because of my Christian faith I:  
A. Try to take every opportunity to tell others of Jesus Christ \_\_\_\_\_  
B. Try to be a "quiet example" but don't talk about my faith \_\_\_\_\_  
unless others ask me  
C. I rarely talk of my faith with others \_\_\_\_\_  
D. I never talk of my faith with others \_\_\_\_\_  
E. Other \_\_\_\_\_
6. BECAUSE OF MY CHRISTIAN FAITH - IN ADDITION to what I would "naturally do":  
A. I work a lot in the church program \_\_\_\_\_  
B. I spend much time helping others OUTSIDE the church program \_\_\_\_\_  
C. I work both within and outside the church program (but do things \_\_\_\_\_  
in addition to what I would "naturally do" because I'm a Christian  
D. I don't do anything special because I am a Christian \_\_\_\_\_  
E. Other \_\_\_\_\_
7. I attended worship for the Special Sermon Series on:  
May 12th \_\_\_\_\_, May 19th \_\_\_\_\_, BOTH dates \_\_\_\_\_, Neither date \_\_\_\_\_.
8. I completed the PREVIOUS questionnaire: Yes No.

Thank you for your time, you have contributed toward a more effective church ministry. I hope you have also gained insight into your own images of God. Please return this form to the church in the enclosed envelope. Thank you again.

## APPENDIX B.

## TABULATED RESULTS

This appendix contains tables of the tabulated results from the project questionnaires.

On pages 108 through 111 is a comparison of the three main groupings used in the study: the control group, Japanese and Western respondents to the first and second questionnaire.

On pages 112 through 115 is a comparison of responses of those who attended the sermon series with those who did not.

## A Comparison of Responses to the Various Questionnaires.

Note that the questions are listed in the order in which they are evaluated in chapter five. All numerical figures represent percentages. A "+" indicates a positive response (a first or second choice) and a "-" represents a negative choice (a crossed out answer or one which was left blank).

## RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS CONCERNING PERCEIVED QUALITIES OF GOD:

QUESTION	Control Group Responses		QUESTIONNAIRE #1				QUESTIONNAIRE #2			
			Japanese		Western		Japanese		Western	
	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
1. WHEN I THINK OF GOD I FEEL . . .										
A. Disturbed because of lifestyle	12	76	15	63	24	43	10	69	22	39
B. Comforted and at peace	84	16	85	15	85	5	100	0	90	6
C. Excited and alive	28	64	66	15	65	21	58	25	75	13
D. No Different	44	40	48	50	12	68	22	63	6	65
2. TO ME GOD IS . . .										
A. Magestic but distant	64	36	35	46	17	56	42	37	13	54
B. Close -like a friend	12	84	70	23	87	7	69	15	90	6
C. Interested in everything I do	16	80	43	43	87	5	63	15	87	8
D. UNInterested in what I do	36	64	8	70	5	89	10	79	6	83
5. TO ME GOD IS . . .										
A. A life principal	36	52	78	15	68	30	90	10	70	27
B. Creator/uninterested in people	8	76	6	85	9	85	0	85	0	90
C. Like Ancestral Spirits	68	32	6	78	3	93	15	69	0	97
D. Like a Parent/loving	20	76	70	31	87	12	85	10	97	3
7. I BELIEVE GOD IS . . .										
A. All powerful	36	56	81	8	70	27	90	5	73	19
B. All powerful but self limiting	52	48	46	54	78	21	58	37	89	8
C. Limited in power	40	68	6	85	2	92	10	90	8	88
D. In competition with Satan	12	84	15	66	10	73	10	58	11	68
6. FORMOST CHARACTERISTIC OF GOD IS										
A. Total acceptance of human action	68	28	35	54	14	76	33	63	8	80
B. Answer prayers of faithful	28	64	43	43	19	39	52	21	30	22
C. Demanding of human justice	20	72	58	35	54	26	58	33	63	15
D. Willingness to suffer for humans	20	76	27	50	58	36	48	42	67	13
3. IF I "SEE GOD" I WOULD . . .										
A. Die, as I am a sinner	4	92	8	73	10	84	0	79	11	57
B. Experience Love and acceptance	48	52	73	23	82	15	90	5	95	5
C. Be called to sacrificial mission	4	92	15	58	44	53	52	37	77	13
D. Discover "my deeper self"	72	24	43	58	10	85	27	52	8	83

	Control Group Responses		QUESTIONNAIRE #1				QUESTIONNAIRE #2			
	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
12. EVIL COMES FROM . . .										
A. God, the creator of all	20	76	23	66	12	84	27	52	6	89
B. People who make mistakes	48	52	78	23	51	27	74	10	65	15
C. Spiritual beings other than God	28	52	19	73	34	53	10	69	41	41
D. Satan rebelling against God	12	88	31	54	53	43	58	37	57	34
13. REGARDING MIRACLES . . .										
A. Miracles do not happen	8	84	3	85	0	97	5	90	0	97
B. Are God overcoming natural laws	28	68	56	43	53	43	58	37	70	30
C. Are God acting by unknown laws	44	52	66	31	72	29	69	31	75	22
D. Have nothing to do with God	56	44	8	78	5	89	10	79	6	77

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS CONCERNING PERCEPTIONS OF THE REALITY OF GOD:

14. GOD IS . . .										
A. THE reality upon whom all others are dependent	8	84	63	27	92	7	52	37	97	3
B. The most powerful of many gods	28	68	43	50	24	84	48	52	39	61
C. Merely one of many gods	44	52	15	73	0	100	10	79	0	90
D. Merely our human unconscious	56	44	15	66	7	87	10	74	11	83
8. "THE GODS" ARE . . .										
A. Another way to say "The Trinity"	16	80	38	63	10	90	33	58	8	63
B. Merely human inventions	28	68	23	63	43	54	37	52	41	54
C. Real but less powerful than God	16	84	8	81	7	89	21	69	11	60
D. Human attempts to explain an incomplete experience of God	28	68	31	58	58	41	37	52	70	30
11. I BELIEVE . . .										
A. There are different gods for each country and person	84	16	19	26	7	85	21	58	8	89
B. Many gods, God is most powerful	12	84	27	73	2	93	15	74	6	90
C. Only one God, but people have different understandings	40	60	89	8	92	9	85	10	89	11
D. Only one God, rest demons	0	96	0	81	10	87	27	69	9	89
4. JESUS CHRIST IS . . .										
A. THE Son of God	16	76	66	19	72	10	63	15	89	0
B. A Son of God, like Buddha	48	48	19	70	9	85	27	63	3	89
C. One who shows what God is like	60	40	43	38	54	21	74	10	54	3
D. God With Us in human form	16	68	43	43	58	10	27	42	54	11

## RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE GOD-HUMAN RELATIONSHIP:

QUESTION	CONTROL GROUP		QUESTIONNAIRE #1				QUESTIONNAIRE #2			
	RESPONSES		Japanese		Western		Japanese		Western	
	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
10. TO ME GOD IS . . .										
A. Very imp/think of God daily	44	52	78	23	85	15	74	21	80	19
B. Rather unimp/think of God only in times of trouble	64	36	15	63	7	93	42	58	8	90
C. Unimportant/rarely think of God	16	50	0	81	0	97	5	90	0	100
9. BECAUSE OF GOD I BELIEVE . . .										
A. I can overcome probs/live w/hope	52	36	85	8	78	5	79	5	65	8
B. Expect to be loved and forgiven	32	52	23	11	76	10	58	10	80	8
C. Must love/forgive others	64	32	66	19	39	10	42	10	41	11
D. Am prevented from doing what want	16	60	0	21	2	68	10	52	0	46
20. I PRAY BECAUSE I WANT GOD TO . .										
A. Grant my requests	48	48	31	46	19	38	15	27	11	11
B. Comfort/heal self or others	80	16	66	31	48	26	90	0	63	11
C. Tell me what to do	28	56	31	38	53	22	63	21	51	8
D. Make me into a child of God	4	92	27	50	61	27	33	33	51	27
16. I USUALLY PRAY WHEN I . . .										
A. Am happy	36	28	66	19	65	17	48	15	63	8
B. Have a problem I can't solve	80	12	78	8	70	15	69	15	70	8
C. Want God to do something for me	44	44	8	54	22	30	33	27	27	19
D. Want to know how to live for God	8	68	31	46	48	24	37	27	51	11
15. I PRAY TO . . .										
A. God	40	52	78	23	92	8	90	10	97	3
B. Jesus	8	84	58	38	66	32	69	21	67	34
C. The spirits of my Ancestors	52	36	6	81	0	98	15	85	0	100
D. Don't know but to something greater than myself	64	24	8	66	7	92	10	74	3	89
17. GOD CHOOSES TO WORK WITH SPECIAL PEOPLE BECAUSE . . .										
A. God loves them more than others	8	84	19	78	2	98	15	74	0	100
B. They are good and God loves good people more than others	28	72	27	66	3	97	10	90	11	89
C. God has a mission for them to do	8	92	66	35	80	20	85	15	95	5

QUESTION	CONTROL GROUP		QUESTIONNAIRE #1				QUESTIONNAIRE #2			
	RESPONSES		Japanese		Western		Japanese		Western	
	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
19. CONCERNING THE GENESIS 12:2 TEXT, I BELIEVE THAT . . .										
A. God especially loves Abraham and his descendents	4	92	19	73	12	78	15	69	24	65
B. God especially loved Abraham but not necessarily his descendents	4	96	15	70	0	90	21	74	8	80
C. God expected Abraham to do something for God.	16	84	19	50	30	65	42	58	34	39
D. God wants to bless others through Abraham	36	64	58	43	78	22	63	37	90	6
18. THE BASIS OF A FAITHFUL LIFE BEFORE GOD IS . . .										
A. Prayer/Thanksgiving to God	72	24	66	31	70	17	97	3	65	6
B. Seeking to do what God calls us to do	44	56	63	31	80	14	69	15	96	3
C. Working/helping in the church	4	76	6	46	7	29	10	27	11	11
D. Telling others of God's love in Jesus Christ	8	80	19	58	17	29	15	27	22	8

A Comparison of Responses of attenders/non-attenders of the sermon series.

Note that the questions are listed in the order in which they are evaluated in chapter five. All numerical figures represent percentages. A "+" indicates a positive response (a first or second choice) and a "-" represents a negative choice (a crossed out answer or one which was left blank).

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS CONCERNING PERCEIVED QUALITIES OF GOD:

QUESTION	NON-ATTENDERS		ATTENDERS	
	+	-	+	-
1. WHEN I THINK OF GOD I FEEL . . .				
A. Disturbed because of lifestyle	16	50	25	42
B. Comforted and at peace	100	0	89	9
C. Excited and alive	66	0	67	17
D. No Different	16	33	6	78
2. TO ME GOD IS . . .				
A. Magestic but distant	50	33	17	48
B. Close -like a friend	50	16	89	9
C. Interested in everything I do	66	33	81	12
D. UNinterested in what I do	0	50	9	87
5. TO ME GOD IS . . .				
A. A life principal	66	16	69	31
B. Creator/uninterested in people	0	83	0	89
C. Like Ancestral Spirits	33	66	0	95
D. Like a Parent/loving	83	0	95	5
7. I BELIEVE GOD IS . . .				
A. All powerful	83	0	75	12
B. All powerful but self limiting	100	0	75	14
C. Limited in power	16	66	14	56
D. In competition with Satan	0	66	14	56
6. FORMOST CHARACTERISTIC OF GOD IS				
A. Total acceptance of human action	33	66	17	69
B. Answer prayers of faithful	66	0	28	20
C. Demanding of human justice	50	33	56	14
D. Willingness to suffer for humans	50	33	67	14
3. IF I "SEE GOD" I WOULD . . .				
A. Die, as I am a sinner	0	66	0	78
B. Experience Love and acceptance	83	0	69	17
C. Be called to sacrificial mission	100	0	69	17
D. Discover "my deeper self"	16	50	12	69

	NON-ATTENDERS		ATTENDERS	
	+	-	+	-
12. EVIL COMES FROM . . .				
A. God, the creator of all	33	66	9	78
B. People who make mistakes	66	33	81	9
C. Spiritual beings other than God	33	50	22	45
D. Satan rebelling against God	50	33	67	20
13. REGARDING MIRACLES . . .				
A. Miracles do not happen	0	100	0	95
B. Are God overcoming natural laws	83	16	64	31
C. Are God acting by unknown laws	83	16	75	22
D. Have nothing to do with God	0	83	3	75

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS CONCERNING PERCEPTIONS OF THE REALITY OF GOD:

14. GOD IS . . .				
A. THE reality upon whom all others are dependent	50	33	89	6
B. The most powerful of many gods	83	16	33	61
C. Merely one of many gods	16	50	0	87
D. Merely our human unconscious	33	33	12	72
8. "THE GODS" ARE . . .				
A. Another way to say "The Trinity"	33	50	9	72
B. Merely human inventions	16	66	39	50
C. Real but less powerful than God	33	66	12	67
D. Human attempts to explain an incomplete experience of God	66	33	58	25
11. I BELIEVE . . .				
A. There are different gods for each country and person	50	16	9	81
B. Many gods, God is most powerful	16	50	9	81
C. Only one God, but people have different understandings	83	16	94	0
D. Only one God, rest demons	33	66	17	72
4. JESUS CHRIST IS . . .				
A. THE Son of God	50	16	87	3
B. A Son of God, like Buddha	66	33	9	87
C. One who shows what God is like	66	16	61	6
D. God With Us in human form	16	33	50	14



## RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE GOD-HUMAN RELATIONSHIP:

QUESTION	NON-ATTENDERS		ATTENDERS	
	+	-	+	-
10. TO ME GOD IS . . .				
A. Very imp/think of God daily	66	16	84	6
B. Rather unimp/think of God only in times of trouble	33	66	14	75
C. Unimportant/rarely think of God	16	83	0	89
9. BECAUSE OF GOD I BELIEVE . . .				
A. I can overcome probs/live w/hope	66	0	69	3
B. Expect to be loved and forgiven	83	0	72	3
C. Must love/forgive others	33	0	53	9
D. Am prevented from doing what want	16	33	0	50
20. I PRAY BECAUSE I WANT GOD TO . .				
A. Grant my requests	16	16	20	14
B. Comfort/heal self or others	100	0	64	6
C. Tell me what to do	33	16	69	6
D. Make me into a child of God	50	16	50	20
16. I USUALLY PRAY WHEN I . . .				
A. Am happy	50	33	58	6
B. Have a problem I can't solve	50	16	72	3
C. Want God to do something for me	33	16	28	17
D. Want to know how to live for God	33	16	67	9
15. I PRAY TO . . .				
A. God	100	0	100	0
B. Jesus	66	0	67	28
C. The spirits of my Ancestors	16	83	0	100
D. Don't know but to something greater than myself	16	16	3	84
17. GOD CHOOSES TO WORK WITH SPECIAL PEOPLE BECAUSE . . .				
A. God loves them more than others	33	50	6	94
B. They are good and God loves good people more than others	16	83	9	91
C. God has a mission for them to do	100	0	95	5

QUESTION	NON-ATTENDERS		ATTENDERS	
	+	-	+	-
19. CONCERNING THE GENESIS 12:2 TEXT, I BELIEVE THAT . . .				
A. God especially loves Abraham and his descendents	50	50	14	64
B. God especially loved Abraham but not necessarily his descendents	0	83	12	67
C. God expected Abraham to do something for God.	0	50	31	45
D. God wants to bless others through Abraham	50	50	87	3
18. THE BASIS OF A FAITHFUL LIFE BEFORE GOD IS . . .				
A. Prayer/Thanksgiving to God	100	0	64	3
B. Seeking to do what God calls us to do	83	0	89	0
C. Working/helping in the church	16	0	14	9
D. Telling others of God's love in Jesus Christ	0	0	20	9

APPENDIX C.

THE SERMONS

This appendix contains the two sermons which were preached for this project.

Beginning on page 117 and running through page 122 is a sermon preached from a more Japanese perspective.

Beginning on page 123 and running through page 128 is a sermon preached from a more Western perspective.

ASK AND YE SHALL RECEIVE	Psalm 30:
Gen 12:2 "I will bless you, . . ."	James 5:13-15
	Matt. 7:7-11

There is an enlightening story of  
 a 1st grade teacher who asked her pupils to draw a picture  
 showing what their fathers did for a living.  
 She noticed one child drawing circles on his paper and  
 thinking that the child was just playing she asked:  
 "And what is your father and how does this  
 show what he does for a living?"  
 "He's a doctor," the child responded,  
 "and he makes 'ROUNDS'."  
 IMAGINATION, notions of responsibilities,  
 ideas of existence, concepts of reality;  
 images that determine how we relate to life.  
 It is our Christian faith that the most basic reality  
 of life is God.  
 If so, what are some of the images of God we hold?

(I. BEFORE WHAT KIND OF GOD DO WE LIVE OUR LIVES? [MATT. 7:7:11])

Even within the Christian faith there are many images of God.  
 Before what kind of a God do you and I live our lives?  
 Do we envision God as a vengful God,  
 one we must appease or risk being punished?  
 Do we imagine God as a grudging God,  
 one we must beg for the necessities of life?  
 Or, like the ancient Greeks, Do we fear that God is a mocking God,  
 who answers prayers with a "stinger"?

The Greeks had their stories about gods who answered prayers,  
 but it was an answer with a barb in it, a doubled-edged gift.  
 AURORA, the goddess of the dawn, so the Greek story ran,  
 fell in love with Tithonus a mortal youth.  
 ZEUS, the king of the gods, offered her any gift that  
 she might choose for her mortal lover.  
 AURORA chose that Tithonus might live for ever; but  
 she forgot to ask that he might remain forever young.  
 So Tithonus grew older and older and older, but  
 could never die. The gift became a curse.

In speaking to the question of our image of God,  
 JESUS ASSURES US that God is NOT a mocking God  
 but a loving, caring God who answers our prayers  
 with a love greater than we can ever imagine.  
 In today's Gospel text, Jesus is clear and to the point:  
 "Is there a father [mother] who hates his/her child?"  
 Jesus argues that no [loving] parent ever refuses the  
 [legitimate] requests of his/her child?  
 How much more, Jesus asks, will God  
 (the great heavenly father/mother) grant the  
 (legitimate) prayers of us who are God's children?

Jesus then illustrates love, comparing parental and Divine.  
 He does so through a series of contrasts.  
 The limestone rocks that could be found alongside the roads  
 DID resemble loaves, but Jesus argues,  
 no parent would give them to a child who asked for bread.

Nor would they as parents ever give a serpent  
 (probably an eel which was ritually unclean and therefore inedible)  
 to a child who asked for a fish, nor  
 would they give a child who asked for an egg a rolled up  
 scorpion, no matter how much like an egg it looked.  
 "AS BAD AS YOU ARE, you Fathers and Mothers give good gifts to  
 your children; HOW MUCH MORE  
 will God give good gifts to persons who ask?" Jesus pleads.

In these comparisons Jesus affirms that  
 God loves us more than mother/father and is  
 anxious to share with us because we are God's beloved children!  
 Because we are children of this loving God we are told  
 not to be afraid to ask God for our needs.

When Jesus challenges us to ask, seek and knock; he is encouraging us  
 to adopt an attitude of TRUST AND EXPECTATION toward God;  
 an attitude of faith in God's promises.  
 This kind of faith is born in, and matures through  
 participation in a community of faith.  
 Here in this faithful community, our personal faith is nurtured  
 and we begin to trust God enough to start to ask OF God.

Scriptures even tell us where to begin to ask [Eph. 4:11-16 et al],  
 for we are told to ask for the gifts of the Spirit, gifts of  
 faith, healing, hospitality, prophecy, service, teaching etc.  
 We are told to ask, in faith that God will respond.  
 At this point in life where we DARE ACT IN FAITH  
 our life in Christ begins to blossom.  
 This asking and seeking is part of what we call prayer.  
 This leads us to the question,

#### WHY PRAY?

[JAMES 5:13-15]

There are many reasons to pray.  
 The reason James states in today's Epistle lesson is that  
 THE CHURCH IS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE HEALING ACTIVITY OF GOD  
 and to do that the church must itself first experience healing.  
 Without that experience we are poor witnesses of God's love,  
 but with it the church becomes a powerful wellspring of  
 God's healing activity.

The instructions about healing given here are inherited from the Synagogue where the custom was for persons who were ill to go to a rabbi who would anoint them with oil and pray over them. That same custom is here recommended to the early Christian church.

Even a superficial reading of the Gospels shows that prayer and healing was a vital part of Jesus' ministry and historical records show this was also true for the early church, continuing long after biblical times.

JUSTIN MARTYR writes of "numberless" cures through prayer of persons who had not been cured by doctors and other methods.  
 IRENAEUS in the second century wrote that the sick were still being healed by having hands laid upon them and being anointed with oil as prayers were offered to God.  
 TERTULLIAN in the Third Century tells of a Roman Emperor ALEXANDER SEVERUS being healed when anointed by a Christian Torpacion.

The book "CANONS OF HIPPOLYTUS," a book of church administration, says that persons who have the gift of healing are to be ordained as presbyters.

1ST EPISTLE OF CLEMENT states that each congregation must appoint at least one WIDOW (here probably an 'Order' of widows) to care for women who are sick.

WHY PRAY? James gives one answer.

Because God is a caring, healing answering God!

There are many other reasons to pray, of course, praise, thanksgiving are but two.

But the focus in this short text is on HEALING, healing within the context of a community of believers living in a relationship of expectation.

In our Prayer Healing service here in Union Church . we are attempting to reclaim/rediscover this healing aspect of the Gospel, seeing it as an integral part of the whole Good News of Jesus.

We start from the realization that

FEW OF US are without some experience of the healing power of the Gospel in our own lives.

It may be physical or emotional healing, or perhaps "spiritual" healing.

Yet, isn't this experience one of the reasons we return to "church" each week because it is here that we worship the God whose healing power we know in our lives?

We cannot overestimate the necessity for this healing in ALL areas of our lives, spiritual as well as physical.

One antagonist criticized Christians:

"You Christians are not like Jesus, therefore, it is clear that since you are still sinners the Gospel has no power to change lives!"

I would respond: "I can speak only for myself, and, yes, it is true, I am far from perfect

BUT YOU SHOULD KNOW ME WITHOUT THE GOSPEL in my life!

I know myself without God (as I know God in Jesus Christ) and also myself when I allow God to heal me and lead me from sin.

I know that FOR ME the Gospel has tremendous power to change lives, for it is changing mine!"

And that began when I ASKED God for healing.

It may be much slower than we wish, but we are constantly being healed and changed by God. The more I ask and seek, the more of that healing change I receive.

I WILL continue to ask and seek for my experience is that I DO receive from God!

THEREFORE, OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD GOD IS ONE OF THANKSGIVING [PSALM 30]

Let us look at Psalm 30 for guidance here.

Although preserved as a part of the liturgy of the People of Israel, this psalm is basically one of personal thanks.

It begins by praising God for an accomplished healing.

The psalmist says his illness had been so severe that he was in danger of going down to the pit; a euphemism for death.

He confesses that BEFORE HIS ILLNESS he was complacent, with a false sense of security.

Then came illness and his PRAYER FOR HEALING:

"What should it profit you [God] if I go to the pit? Will the dust praise you and tell of your faithfulness?"

To ancient persons a god with no one to sing praise to that god was thought to be an EXTINCT deity.

Perhaps with this in mind he was attempting to bargain with God for healing.

At any rate, despite any imperfection in his theology

God Answered and the psalmist was healed.

Lamentations turned to praise & singing, sackcloth to festal garments.

These are not empty words for rites of thanks performed in the temple included dancing and loud songs of praise.

The psalmist EXTOLS GOD for healed him and not letting skeptics gloat over his faith in God, in the absence of God's response.

"My soul will praise thee, and not be silent," he cries.

He then calls the "saints", all the faithful to JOIN in his songs of praise that God had answered his prayer.

ILLNESS, PRAYER, and the resultant HEALING

bring forth an outburst of praise and thanksgiving.

Perhaps only those who have known illness, grief, trial or fear can appreciate both the plunging depths and the soaring heights of this psalmist's soul.

From the "pit", the bottom of the abyss of life;

where there is no hope, no joy,

from this "pit" has the psalmist cried out to God for help.

And now, at the point where this psalm was born, here as this ancient psalmist experiences the joy of

TRANSITION from despair to hope,

from the shadow of death to life,

we are allowed to share in his joy and thanksgiving.

This transition point,

this moment when despair gives way to hope, darkness to light is such a moment of grace!

When we have health and joy, ease and comfort we are often dulled to the true depths and joys of life.

But when, after a period of pain and helplessness, we begin the glorious trip BACK UP out of the pit of despair, how all those things we have hitherto taken for granted suddenly are seen for what they are, gifts from God, the joy of the gift of life.

How clearly we see then, at that transition time, that turning point.

How fully we experience then, before our senses are once again dulled to the glory of life.

How our spirits shout in praise.

To be silent at such a time is unthinkable.

How fully do we experience the goodness of life.

Yes, we know life's dark side,

WE HAVE JUST EXPERIENCED IT IN ITS FULLNESS

but despite its terror and power

we have experienced the greater love and power of God who has brought us out of the pit and back into life.

BECAUSE OF THAT EXPERIENCE how our hearts and souls now sing with praise to our God who has saved us!

BEFORE WHAT KIND OF A GOD DO WE LIVE OUR LIVES?

Jesus teaches that God is a caring God who answers our prayers in the context of great divine wisdom and love.

Therefore can our attitude toward God be anything but

One of praise, thanksgiving and joyous life!



**WHY PRAY?**

Both because Jesus and scriptures teach us to do so and  
because WE HAVE EXPERIENCED God's healing power in our lives  
transforming and changing us to become more like Jesus.

When God called Abraham to leave everything he had and  
follow where God would lead, God promised:

"I will bless you, . . . so that you may be a blessing."

"Ask, and you will receive,  
Seek, and you will find,  
Knock and it will be opened to you."

As participants in that promise through Jesus Christ  
let us claim that blessing.

Amen.

GO AND DO LIKEWISE  
[Gen 12:2] ". . . so that you may be a blessing."

Isaiah 6:1-8  
I Cor 15:1-11  
Lk 5:1-11

During a very dry spell, a farmer confronted the local minister  
"Pastor, why don't you get busy praying so we get some rain?"  
"Sorry," the minister replied, "I am in sales not management!"  
ONCE AGAIN we are faced with the question of our images of God.

Today's texts speak to the question of our images of God.  
Our O.T. text from Isaiah (6:1-8) examines the question:  
What happens when we experience ourselves standing before God?

THE IMAGERY HERE is taken from the ancient temple where Isaiah  
is taking his turn in the sanctuary fulfilling his priestly duties.  
The vision itself which seems to be set in a "heavenly council,"  
is filled with images of God's greatness and majesty.  
Isaiah's experience is that God is so HOLY that the very  
foundations of the temple quake at God's presence,  
the temple fills with smoke and  
Isaiah is unable clearly to see God.

Perceiving himself to be "sinner" in the holy presence of God  
Isaiah believes he is about to die and it is only when  
he is purified by the angel that he is able to hear,  
not a death sentence from God,  
but God's call to go in God's service.  
He quickly accepts that mission.

#### I. BEFORE WHAT KIND OF GOD DO WE LIVE OUR LIVES? [ISAIAH 6:1-8]

The first thing about this vision of Isaiah is that it  
REVEALS something of WHO GOD IS.  
We must remember that this is the same  
God and "Father" of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God is depicted as KING, enthroned in majesty,  
incomparably great, with such burning light surrounding  
"the God-head" that even the heavenly hosts must  
shield their bodies from the glory of God's presence.  
God is shown as "The Holy One," whose true nature  
exposes the sinfulness of humanity.

Isaiah speaks of God here with "kingly" imagery perhaps  
because this is the greatest image at Isaiah's disposal.  
By calling God "Heavenly King" Isaiah places God in the  
position above all other positions.

This vision condemns any approach to worship God  
which is too casual.  
Do We sometimes enter our worship with inadequate preparation or  
seriousness, almost casually?

Isaiah's vision shows that if we do approach the one TRUE GOD  
we immediately experience our sinfulness and  
feel judged by God's Holy presence.

In Jesus Christ we know God as a God of love, but  
this revelation of Isaiah stands in judgement on any  
merely sentimental understanding of that love.

This vision emphasizes the absolute righteousness of God,  
who is TOTALLY OTHER from the whole of creation.

God's goodness exposes all human evil.

Thus standing in God's presence, Isaiah perceives himself  
as a person of sin and confesses: [6:5 RSV]

"Woe is me, for I am lost;  
for I am a man of unclean lips,  
and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;  
for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

"Woe is me, for I am lost . . ."

In the presence of God's righteousness  
where human life is compared with the Divine Holiness,  
Isaiah experiences himself as unworthy,  
he sees himself as he truly is, a person of sin.

Despite Isaiah's experience of unworthiness in God's presence,  
God is revealed to him as a God of mercy.

Through the symbolic cleansing of Isaiah's lips  
by the burning coals taken from the altar,  
God forgives Isaiah's sin, accepts Isaiah's humanness  
along with all its inherent weakness,  
and THEN calls this newly forgiven sinner, Isaiah,  
to be part of God's purpose/mission on earth.

But, it is only AFTER experiencing his sin/God's forgiveness,  
that Isaiah is able to hear God speak to him.

It is ONLY THEN that he is enlisted into God's mission.

This vision shows God as one who  
Calls persons into the divine work of God,  
for when we know who God is,  
we also know that God sends us on a mission.

Scripture makes it clear that worship of God is  
never an end in itself.

In the Bible God is always on the move,  
always working toward the goal of establishing  
"the kingdom" on earth.

Revelation in the bible always includes  
a command to action.

# BEFORE WHAT KIND OF GOD DO WE LIVE OUR LIVES?

Before a God of Power, Purity and Purpose;  
a God who speaks to us out of that divine state  
forgives and cleanses us and then  
calls us to participate in the Divine Mission.

II. The second question our texts present to us is  
the question: WHY PRAY? [I Cor. 15:1-11]

We are going to see a different answer to this question  
than we saw last week.

BEFORE dealing with the Epistle Text let us look at Acts 9:1-9  
and Paul's vision of the resurrected Christ which I understand  
to be nothing other than God's answer to Paul's prayers.

Paul, who up to this time has been very anti-Christian,  
is travelling to Damascus to arrest followers of Christ when  
he has a vision of the Resurrected Christ who confronts him,  
asks why Paul is persecuting him and then commands Paul:  
"Rise, enter the city and you will be told what you are to do."  
Paul is conscripted into "The Way."  
He is called to carry that message he has  
hitherto suppressed.

It is this SAME Paul who wrote today's Epistle lesson.  
As he answers questions about the resurrection of the dead,  
Paul recounts the content of both his calling by Christ,  
and the content of the message with which he is entrusted:  
Christ died according to scriptures, was buried, and  
on the third day was raised by God to new life, and  
appeared to his followers, last of all appearing to Paul.  
This is the Christ Paul now serves.

WHY PRAY? Paul's experience was that we pray to be enlisted into  
the saving activity of the God who loves us in Christ.  
Our texts speak of PRAYER and VISION.  
Let us not limit these realities to some  
"special persons" who lived long ago.  
Let us not ignore their claim on our lives.

Twenty-five years ago a missionary nurse spoke in  
a small church in Salem, Oregon.  
Two young people listened to her, and it seemed that  
through her God called them into mission. Prayer together,  
feverish applications, and orientation and travel over,  
Judy and I arrived in Tokyo in the Fall of that same year.  
Answered prayer, visions and a call from God;  
they happen to all of us and I affirm that  
the reason most of us are here in church today is that  
IN SOME WAY WE HAVE HEARD AND ANSWERED THAT CALL OF GOD!

# WHY PRAY?

To be enlisted into the glorious mission of God in Christ!  
And it IS a glorious life-mission, as so many of us can attest.

III. The last question today's texts raise is this: [Lk. 5:1-11]  
WHAT ATTITUDE IN LIFE ARE WE CALLED BY GOD TO ADOPT?  
As you can tell already, these questions are interrelated.

In today's Gospel we read of the "call" of Peter.  
In the synoptics, only Luke tells of the great catch of fish  
which preceded Jesus telling Peter:  
"henceforth you will be catching [people]."

# FISHING FOR PEOPLE.

What kind of People will this poor rural fisherman be seeking?  
Peter's first task was to follow Jesus in that ministry  
which centered in the People of Israel, Peter's own people.  
This was a natural place to start and  
a comfortable place for Peter to do his fishing.  
It was his "home waters."

Later, however, Peter's ethnocentric approach was challenged  
by a vision he had while praying on the rooftop,  
when he "saw a sheet lowered before him," a sheet which  
contained all kinds of animals which were "unclean" and  
forbidden as food, with the command "kill and eat."  
Three times the vision was repeated.  
Three times he refused the command to eat.  
A thrice repeated vision was understood to mean that it  
was SET and determined, unchangeable and unchallengeable.  
"What God has cleansed, you must not call  
unclean [common]," he was told.

The subsequent arrival of the messenger of Cornelius,  
a Roman citizen, a Gentile/Pagan, one of the "unclean,"  
enlisted the still somewhat reluctant Peter as  
a missionary in God's mission of universal love.  
Peter prayed, God answered with an unexpected call to  
GO and be a missionary to a group of persons  
outside the group Peter considered to be "his flock."  
Peter went and the results suprised even Peter.

I believe that our texts point to at least three attitudes  
we are called by God to adopt:  
Readiness to obey God's call,  
Openness to God's New Thing,  
and Gratitude for being found "worthy" to be a part of God's work.

We are called by God, that is a basic biblical message.  
 In order to be a part of what God is doing in this world  
 we must be ready to follow the call of God and  
 be doers of that word as best we understand it.

Like Paul on the road to Damascus, we may find our initial  
 understanding of the faith to be incomplete, even wrong;  
 but it is NOT our lack of understanding which deters us  
 from being followers of Christ, it is our failure  
 to act upon what we DO UNDERSTAND that hinders us.

Peter's prayers were answered by a vision of a sheet  
 filled with new possibilities,  
 hither-to-for unconsidered opportunities.

The book of Acts is clear that following this vision  
 was a lifetime struggle for Peter to act on it.

But doing God's new thing, that is, acting on the  
 realization that God's love is not limited to a  
 specific people, was, indeed, a step toward  
 grasping God's universal care and concern  
 for all persons.

To participate in that universal love, Peter had to have an  
 open attitude, willing to follow where ever God led.  
 God often leads where we would not otherwise go.

Henri Nouwen illustrates this by retelling the story of  
 Father Agathon an Egyptian desert monk.

Going to town one day to sell some small articles,  
 by the roadside, Fr. Agathon met a crippled man,  
 paralyzed in his legs, who asked Agathon where he was going.  
 Agathon replied, "to town to sell some things."

"Do me a favor and carry me there," the cripple said.  
 So Agathon carried him to the town. The cripple said,  
 "put me down where you sell your wares." He did so.

When Agathon had sold an article, the crippled man asked,  
 "What did you sell it for?" and Agathon told him the price.  
 The cripple said, "buy me a cake," and he bought it.  
 When Fr. Agathon sold a second article, the cripple man asked,  
 "How much did you sell it for?" and he told the price and  
 the cripple said, "Buy me this," and he bought it.

When Agathon, having sold all his wares, wanted to go, the cripple said:  
 "are you going back?" and he replied, "Yes."  
 "Do me the favor of carrying me back to the place where you found me."  
 Agathon did so and the Cripple said: "Agathon,  
 you are filled with divine blessings, in heaven and earth."  
 Looking, Agathon saw no man, it was an angel of the Lord.

As Christians we are attempting to follow God's leading.  
Agathon did the simple - but to many repulsive thing - of  
simply responding to another's requests.

To some those requests appear as demands, but  
Agathon's discovery was that God perceived them as needs.  
Needs through which we serve God by responding to  
those around us.

We are called to see the world  
with the eyes of our Holy God;  
to join in that great Divine plan of  
redemption and salvation for  
ourselves, and for all human society,  
and DO this NEW THING to which God calls us.

Praise be to God  
who deems us worthy to participate  
in this magnificent ministry!

Amen.

APPENDIX D.

THE LITURGY

This appendix contains the two liturgies used for the worship services on the Sundays of the mini-sermon series.



## THE SERVICE OF WORSHIP

### GATHERING

PRELUDE                      selected                      Mendelssohn  
(A time for quiet reflection, meditation, and silent prayer.)

*"If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed . . .  
nothing will be impossible to you." Matt. 17:20*

GREETING    (A word from God's Word, welcoming us to worship)    Pastor

\*CALL TO WORSHIP    (from Psalm 116)                      Responsively  
Lit.    I love the Lord,  
People    Because God has heard the voice of my supplications,  
          Because God has inclined a listening ear to me,  
          I will call upon the Lord as long as I live.  
          I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving,  
          and pay my vows to the Lord.  
          In the courts of the house of the Lord,  
          I will give praise to the Lord my God.

\*THE GIFT OF PEACE  
PEACE : "(Name) the peace of God is yours today."  
RESPONSE: "(Name) and yours also."

\*HYMN #29                      Now Thank We All Our God

### CONFESSION

A PERIOD OF SILENCE IN PREPARATION FOR CONFESSION

CALL TO CONFESSION                      Liturgist  
PRAYER OF CONFESSION                      Unison

We offer our praise to you O God, for we acknowledge that we have experienced your compassion, love and power. We have come to trust in your loving care reaching into our everyday lives. Yet, we must confess that those times we come to you seeking "miracles" it is usually for ourselves that we seek. When we receive the blessings you bestow upon us, we confess that we use them primarily for our own benefit. Open our eyes, that we may trust your wonder-working power and allow that power to work in us, and through us for others. In Christ's name, Amen.

SILENCE FOR PERSONAL CONFESSION

WORDS OF ASSURANCE                      Pastor  
THE LORD'S PRAYER    (Hymnal, front cover, traditional)    Unison

\*THE GLORIA PATRI #513

### INSTRUCTION

THE CHILDREN'S TIME                      Children and Pastor

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON    Psalm 30                      (O.T. p.611)  
(A time of silence for reflection on the scripture)

ANTHEM

THE EPISTLE LESSON                      James 5:13-15                      (N.T. p.314)  
(A time of silence for reflection on the scripture)

\*HYMN (Sop) #33                      Amazing Grace  
(Children K-4th grades may leave for the church hour activity at this time)

THE GOSPEL LESSON                      Matt 7:7-11                      (N.T. p. 9)  
(A time of silence for reflection on the scripture)

THE SERMON                      Pastor  
HOW WE SEE GOD: I. "Ask And Ye Shall Receive"  
Gen 2:12 "I will bless you . . ."

### PRAYER

CELEBRATIONS AND CONCERNS FOR PRAYER                      The Congregation  
PRAYER OF INTERCESSION                      Pastor  
COMMON PRAYER                      Unison

O loving and compassionate God, who Jesus taught us to call our Father; yet who are more than Father or Mother to us: teach us to ask, to dare risk the prayer of faith in trusting our lives to your care. Teach us to expect that you do care about the day to day events of our lives, and that it is not foolish to seek your guidance for each of them. Teach us to recognize the answers which you give to our prayers, that we may grow into deeper perceptions of your working in our lives. Nurture our spirits that, receiving more from you, we may then share more with others. We pray in the name and Spirit of Jesus Christ, your immeasurably great gift to us. Amen.

### DEDICATION

OFFERING OUR GIFTS

Our Tithes and Offerings from our abundance  
Offertory                      selected                      Mendelssohn  
\*Doxology #515  
Prayer of Dedication and Thanksgiving

\*HYMN (SoP) #60                      Fill My Cup, Lord

\*BENEDICTION                      Pastor

POSTLUDE                      selected                      Mendelssohn

INFORMAL MOMENTS                      Pastor

(Following the Service of Worship you are invited to the Gamlin Fellowship Hall on the ground floor for Coffee, Tea, and continued Fellowship.)

## THE SERVICE OF WORSHIP

### GATHERING

PRELUDE "Chorale" Brahms  
(A time for quiet reflection, meditation, and silent prayer.)

*"Which of these three proved neighbor to the man who fell among robbers? . . . The one who helped him. . . Go and do likewise." Lk. 10:29-37*

GREETING (A word from God's Word, welcoming us to worship) Pastor

\*CALL TO WORSHIP (from Micah 6:6-) Responsively  
Lit. With what shall we come before the Lord and  
Bow ourselves before God on high?  
People Shall we come before The Sovereign One  
with burnt offerings and libations for our sin?  
God has showed you, O people, what is good and  
what the Lord requires of you;  
We will do justice, and love kindness and  
walk humbly with our God.

\*THE GIFT OF PEACE  
PEACE : "(Name) the peace of God is yours today."  
RESPONSE: "(Name) and yours also."

\*HYMN #35 When Morning Gilds the Skies

### CONFESSION

A PERIOD OF SILENCE IN PREPARATION FOR CONFESSION

CALL TO CONFESSION Liturgist  
PRAYER OF CONFESSION Unison  
Lord Jesus Christ, forgive your church we pray; our wealth in  
a world of poverty; our fears when confronting injustice; our  
cowardice in facing oppressors. Forgive us, your people, for  
our lack of confidence in your sustaining presence and our  
lack of trust in your loving mercy. Forgive us, we pray, and  
restore us to our covenant with you and each other. Bring us  
to true repentance and strengthen us with the knowledge of  
your Holy Spirit. Amen.

SILENCE FOR PERSONAL CONFESSION

WORDS OF ASSURANCE Pastor

THE LORD'S PRAYER (Hymnal, front cover, contemporary) Unison

\*THE GLORIA PATRI #513

## INSTRUCTION

THE CHILDREN'S TIME Children and Pastor

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON Isaiah 6:1-8 (O.T. p.749)  
(A time of silence for reflection on the scripture)

ANTHEM "Slow Me Down, Lord" Dale Wood

THE EPISTLE LESSON 1 Cor 15:1-11 (N.T. p.235)  
(A time of silence for reflection on the scripture)

\*Hymn #405 Master, No Offering Costly and Sweet  
(Children K-4th grades may leave for the church hour activity at this time)

THE GOSPEL LESSON Luke 5:1-11 (N.T. p. 84)  
(A time of silence for reflection on the scripture)

THE SERMON HOW WE SEE GOD: II. "Go And Do Likewise" Pastor  
Gen 12:2 "... So that you may be a blessing."

## PRAYER

CELEBRATIONS AND CONCERNS FOR PRAYER The Congregation  
PRAYER OF INTERCESSION Pastor  
COMMON PRAYER Unison  
Ever challenging yet constantly loving God; we are amazed at  
the persistence of your patience. Each day you meet us in the  
presence of the cripple, the hungry and hurting, and give us  
opportunity to serve you. Each week we have numerous chances  
to do the loving, caring and sanctifying acts which truly give  
you glory and praise. Continue to open our eyes to see your  
presence among us, and sensitize our hearts to respond to the  
needs of others so that, at least in us, your will be done on  
earth as it is in heaven. To that end we pledge ourselves to  
your service, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## DEDICATION

OFFERING OUR GIFTS  
Our Tithes and Offerings from our abundance  
Offertory "Chorale" Brahms  
\*Doxology #515  
Prayer of Dedication and Thanksgiving

\*HYMN #426 The Voice of God is Calling

\*BENEDICTION Pastor

POSTLUDE "Chorale" Brahms

INFORMAL MOMENTS Pastor

(Following the Service of Worship you are invited to the Gamblin Fellowship Hall on the ground floor for Coffee, Tea, and continued Fellowship.)